

Practical Sermons

By the late REVEREND

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Printed at the earnest Desire of the CONGREGATION, and others that were his Occasional Hearers.

V O L. II.

The THIRD EDITION, Corrected.

He being dead, yet speaketh. HEB. xi. 4.



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S E R M O N I.

PSALM XXVII. 13.

*I had fainted, unless I had believed to
see the Goodness of the Lord in the
Land of the Living.*

THE words in the *original* are abrupt, as being uttered under great commotion and deep sense of mind. This Psalmist having mentioned the trials to which he was exposed, shews the great impression the thoughts of them made upon him, and how sad his case had been, were it not for the supports of faith he had afforded him: *Unless, faith he, I had believed to see the Goodness of the Lord in the Land of the Living, i. e. I cannot say what had become of me: I had surely fainted, been overwhelmed, and quite dead.*

By *the land of the living*, is often meant the present world, in opposition to the grave, *the state of the dead*: And so *David* might refer to the mercy God had promised him upon earth, which he comforted himself with the expectation of; but I cannot suppose him to have left out the great things reserved in heaven, those

which the goodness of God hath there *laid up for those that love him*; things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man to conceive of. Heaven may well be stiled the *land of the living*: it is the world where there is no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, &c. in comparison of which, this world is a state of *mortality*, into which we are born with tears, brought forth to trouble, and must e'er it be long, leave it. Some of the *Hebrew Commentators* understand this phrase, *the land of the living*, to set forth the future state of life above; and upon this the *Psalmist's* hope chiefly and ultimately fixed, as what was necessary and sufficient to his support: And all God's saints should imitate him. *I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

Doct. *Such is the condition of saints upon earth, that only the faith of seeing the goodness of God in the better world, can keep them from fainting in the way to it. If in this life only we shall have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable,*
1 Cor. xv. 19.

I speaking to this, I shall

I. Briefly consider the condition of saints in this present world, as to the trials they are subject to.

II. How the soul is to be engaged by faith, in reference to the blessedness of heaven: which we shall here understand by *the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

III. Whence, and in what manner faith keeps us from fainting, and conduces to our support
in

in the way to it : which will lead to the *Application*.

I. The condition of saints in the present world, as to the trials they are subject to. These are here supposed to be such, as that they are sometimes ready to faint, and would do so, but for the supports of faith. This is a truth of which experience is full evidence ; and therefore I need not be long upon it.

We are born sinners into a world that lies in wickedness ; and hence are brought forth to sorrow, as the sparks fly upward. We are cast on a climate where Satan rules, as its God : And those who are new-born, are the peculiar objects of his hatred and rage : whom he will, by policy or power, seek to deceive and destroy ; and he has too much, even in the best, to work upon. It were hence easy to shew, that the trials of saints in the present life, are neither light, nor few. Considered as men, they share in the effects of God's displeasure together with the rest of mankind, for their original apostacy : considered as Christians, they are exposed to the malice of Satan and a degenerate world, and blinded and acted by him : considered as imperfect Christians, they are groaning under the remains of corruption while on earth : and how sad were their estate, could they look no further ?

I. Considered as men, how grievous are the common calamities of the human nature ! The world through sin is subject to vanity, filled with vexation : and saints in great measure find it so, as well as others. They are indeed redeemed

from eternal death, the wages of sin, in the next world; but infinite wisdom hath thought fit to leave them under many afflictive evils in this: which though sanctified, so as afterwards to yield the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness, are not for the present *joyous, but grievous*, Heb. xii. 11.

It is no unusual thing for saints to *chatter like cranes*, and swallows, though not to murmur, under their racking pains, *Isa. xxxviii. 14.* Our souls are lodg'd in crazy distemper'd bodies, liable to a thousand diseases, which are ready to prey upon them, and reduce them to breathless clods. And how hard would it be to bear up under what we feel or fear, as men, were it not for faith and hope, that it shall not be always with us as now?

2. There are new trials saints usually experience upon account of their devotedness to God. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous*, as such, *Psal. xxxiv. 19.* They have set their faces heavenward, and are resolved to live godly in Christ Jesus; and for this the world is incensed against them. A secret enmity boils in the heirs of hell against all the expectants of heaven, who seeing they will not take up with this world for their portion, will not allow them a quiet passage through it, or any tolerable abode upon it.

Jesus Christ tells his disciples, *In the world ye shall have tribulation*; and they have all along found his prediction true: so that through many tribulations they have entered into the kingdom of God, *Acts xiv. 22.* In scripture we have an
account

account of their sufferings in the earlier days of the world. They were treated as the common refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things; endured cruel mockings and scourgings; were stoned, tortured, and turned out to wander and perish. And the history and experience of later times tell us, the devil and his angels have not yet changed their natures, or laid down their enmity against the saints. Christ's servants are often put to resist unto blood, striving against sin; and what should keep them from fainting under the sufferings that are their lot in this world, but the faith of *seeing the goodness of God in the land of the living?*

3. As imperfect saints, they have no small addition to this affliction, from the remains of sin in themselves, and the sad effects of it in others, both in the world and church. If they look on the world, they see it lying in wickedness, their God dishonoured, the murderer served, the flesh pleased, and souls undone. They daily pray that the will of God may be done on earth, as it is in heaven; but alas, they see it still continue too much like hell. And how are their righteous souls vexed with the abominations of those among whom they dwell?

If they look to the *church, the saints, the excellent of the earth*, in whom, if in any, they promise themselves *delight*: how often are their hearts wounded by beholding their sad divisions, their unchristian heats, and how often they give occasion for the question, *Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?* And who can look on, and not

with his head a fountain of tears, that he might continually mourn for what he cannot help?

And yet further cause of grief occurs, if we turn in upon ourselves, to observe our weak graces, our strong corruptions, our danger from a deceitful heart within, and a subtle and busy adversary without, and how often we are surprized, and fall, to the grieving of the Holy Spirit, breaking our peace, disquieting conscience, and losing the comfortable sense of God's favour and love? These are some of the trials, which saints are here subject to.

II. Let us see how the soul is to be engaged by faith, with reference to *the goodness of God in the land of the living*, the felicity of the better world, when it is kept from fainting under the trials of this.

It is plain every kind, and manner of acting of faith is not sufficient for this. But

1st. That which engages the mind in the *most serious* contemplation of this goodness of God in the land of the living, into the light of which it is brought by the gospel. Heaven is not set open to be neglected; though most look downward, and virtually say, that earth is better. What, my soul, deserves thy serious thoughts, if not the goodness God hath prepared for those that love him, the felicity Christ hath purchased and is now in possession of? Look off from the world, where sin hath let in so much sorrow, to the fulness of joy in the presence of God, and the pleasures that are at his right-hand for evermore: and let not thy thoughts be trifling and transient

transient about things with which thy eternal abode is expected.

Though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, there is enough discovered to call off our minds from all things here below, and fix them more steadily on things above. Believers are known under the character of *strangers* in the present world; as their principal concern is, or ought to be in another. And when any thing would unseasonably tempt down their minds and hearts from things above, how readily may they say, I am better employed?

2. It is a faith that carries up the soul by love and choice to the *goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*, as preferable to all that can be here enjoyed, and as enough to make amends for whatever we may endure. Its genuine language is this, O how great is the goodness that thou hast laid up for them that fear thee! How unworthy is any thing here to stand in competition with it! *The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, and I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord;* and have reason to do it, however it go with me now, *Psal. xvi. 5, 6, 7.*

Thus *Moses* chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. And esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of *Egypt*: for he had respect to the recompence of reward. The fashion of this world is passing away. O how empty and unsatisfactory are all things in it, in comparison of the habitation of the saints in light! How naked shall I e're

long be left, if this is all I am to have! Think O my soul of this, and of the inexpressible sorrow in which they will be doomed to lie for ever, who have their good things here; and then who would not say with the *Psalmist*, Let men of the world have their portion in this present life: *As for me, O Lord, I will behold thy face in righteousness, and I shall be satisfied.* Let me have my part in the good land, and take this wilderness who will.

And as for the *evils* to which I am exposed, how little a thing is it to go mourning to the heavenly *Sion*, where my God shall be my glory and everlasting joy. *The sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared to the glory to be revealed.* Lord, let me have my lot with those that mourn and suffer, groan and die, so I may have an interest in thy loving kindness, which is better than life, and may at last be brought to thy presence to be happy in that life for ever.

3. It is a faith that raises up to, and is accompanied with a well-grounded hope of the happiness to be enjoyed above, which is of use to keep the soul from sinking under present sufferings. *I had fainted*, could I not have looked to the end of this vale of tears into a better state, where I trust I shall arrive safe at last, how long and deep soever be the way. There remaineth a rest for the people of God; and though out of sight, hope enters into that which is within the vail, and so proves an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, enabling them to ride out the storm, in which how sorely soever they may be tossed,
they

they shall not perish or come short of the kingdom they are making to.

He that hath wrought them for the self-same thing is God: and having made them meet for heaven, will not always keep them at so mournful a distance. They look up to the glory of the other world, as that for which the price is paid; of which their Head and Lord is in possession, and for which the royal word is past: and all the promises are *yea* and *amen* in him: therefore, whatever trials they are to pass through, they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. *Faithful is he that hath promised, who also will do it.*

4. It works the heart to a patient waiting, till the season comes wherein the longing expectants of heaven shall not fail of being called up thither. Though the goodness be great I hope for, and the misery great I endure; yet I am not in a sinful and impatient haste. I resign it to the divine good pleasure, when my warfare shall be accomplished, and the trial of my faith shall be finished. I know on what ground I shall look for the fruition of blessedness. It is a reward indeed, yet not of merit, but of grace.

I know from how miserable an estate I was raised to any hope of it, and prepared for it. And though my inclinations are strong to obtain it, and my Redeemer strong to give it; yet in patience I would possess my own soul, till I am called up to enjoy glory.

It is far better to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord: but when, or in what manner, I shall leave my present state, is
not

not mine to chuse; but to labour, *whether present or absent, to be accepted of him.* The whole creation groaneth, and travelleth in pain together until now: and not only they, but ourselves also, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, &c. Rom. x. 23. *We groan, not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon with our house which is from heaven,* 2 Cor. v. 1, 2, 4. But as we have need of patience from the greatness of the expected blessedness: so, upon this same ground, we have reason for it too, as it is enough to make amends for the longest stay.

O happy they that have got within the Veil, who see and enjoy what I *believe*; and do already possess a thousand times more than I can conceive of! O how gladly would I be with them, and make one of that joyful assembly! And, he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. He wisdom to know the fittest season, and will not forget me when that season comes: wherefore all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my great Lord give me leave to die, in order to enter into his joy. I would not be weary of the work he hath given me to do, nor sink under the burdens he would have me bear, but by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality; and rely on his promise to bestow eternal life, which cannot fail, though for a time deferred. I am secure as to his faithfulness, and calmly trust him for a blessed issue. *Surely there is an end, and, O my soul, thy expectation shall not be cut off.* And how little while need the longest stay appear, when all along thou art in
the

the view and way to that blessedness, which will never end?

5. Lastly, It is a faith that excites the most serious diligence that they do not come short, or fail of seeing and enjoying *the goodness God hath laid up for them that love him.*

After the most raised views of the promised blessedness, it is no unusual thing for a believer to turn in, and debate the matter with himself, in such manner as this. O my soul! are my hopes sure and well-grounded? Am I indeed an heir of that glory, in comparison of which all this world is to be disvalued and contemned? Am I a member of Christ, and in the number of those who having received him, and have power given to become sons of God? *If children then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.* And under the profession of this, what have I to evidence it to be real? Is the bent of my heart, and the course of my life such as becomes one that expects to see the goodness of God in the land of the living?

Who can have so glorious a prize before him, and not be solicitous to make it sure? Strive, and pray, and watch, and run, and with unfainting perseverance hold out to the end, that ye may lay hold on eternal life. Upon this ground, *Paul* was at so much pains with himself; *lest that by any means, after he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away,* 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27. And *David* earnestly prays, *Psalms* cxxxix. 23, 24. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there*

there be any wickedness in me ; and lead me in the way everlasting.

This faith is to work in the soul it supports or keeps from fainting. Now it is easy to shew,

III. Whence and in what manner it helps to do so. That it is of special influence, in order to this, is plain from the example of our blessed Lord, *Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame, Heb. xii. 2.* The proposed joy which was to be his reward, drew him chearfully on through all the sorrows and sufferings that lay in his way. And the Apostle tells us, for this cause we faint not ; no, whatever we suffer we still hold out : *While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen : for the things that are seen, are temporal : but the things that are not seen, are eternal, 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17, 18.* *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, 1 John v. 4.* The faith of seeing the goodness of God in the land of the living, helps to carry us through our present trials : and this several ways.

I. From the transcendent excellency the believing soul discerns in it, to which the labours and sufferings of the present life bear no proportion. Though heaven does not lie open to an eye of sense, the believer sees so much of it, as makes him sit down abundantly satisfied with his choice, and to bless God for giving him counsel, not to take up with earth for his portion, but lay up his treasure in heaven. He views the goodness reserved in the land of the living, in its causes, nature, and end ; and cannot but have raised apprehensions of it, as worthy its divine

vine Author, and answering the costs and preparations expended and gone through about it. Infinite love laid the foundation of the heavenly kingdom, and that from everlasting: Infinite merit regained it, when lost, and made way for the offer and promise to take place: Infinite wisdom and power contrived the frame, and raised the superstructure: And infinite grace will see that there is nothing wanting to compleat the happiness of the ransomed of the Lord, upon their arrival there. And whilst the saints view it by faith, under such considerations as these, and can give a reason of their hope, as to an interest in all; what wonder is it if they have their spirits revived, and their hearts encouraged to bear, or suffer, or part with any thing here below?

It is our undue esteem of the good things of this life, as if there were nothing higher; and our excessive fear of the evils, as if not to be made up by something better, that make us so loath to part with the one, and so apt to sink under the other.

No reason hath the saint to faint in the day of trial, but to rejoyce and sing, even *in the valley of the shadow of death*, seeing by faith he can look and hope for heaven beyond it.

2. Faith as to the heavenly felicity is of use to keep saints from fainting under their present sufferings, as it is what those sufferings tend to prepare them for. *Our light afflictions*, saith the Apostle, *which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: And for this cause we faint not*, 1 Cor. iv. 17.

Our

Our heaviest sorrows are influential unto our highest happiness, and who can sink under them, that knows whither they tend? *All things, to the saints, shall work together for Good*: and afflictions among the rest; as they serve to purge out their corruptions, actuate their graces, make them meet for heaven, and bring them under the special promise of it, 2 Tim. ii. 12. *If we suffer with Christ, we shall reign with them.*

The poor, the mourner, the persecuted are particularly pronounced *blessed*; *because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* And by these rough strokes, they are fitting for their designed place in the celestial temple. The dolorous way is what our blessed Lord travelled before them; and he is now entered into his glory. Rom. viii. 17. *If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*

3. Faith looking upwards to the *goodness of God in the land of the living*, sometimes fills the hearts of saints with a divine joy; *which joy of their Lord is their strength*, Neh. viii. 10.

Three things may be matter of joy to saints in their believing contemplations of heaven.

(1.) Their present title to it, founded on Christ's purchase, and the Father's promise. Heaven is the purchased possession, the fruit of Christ's blood; and believers as such, have a new Covenant title to it. Being children they are heirs, and the everlasting kingdom is their portion. And the Father's promise settles the same; and this on purpose that his people may rejoice in the hope of it. Heb. vi. 17, 18. *God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of pro-*

promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

(2.) What they are thus entitled to, they shall never lose, nor be deprived of. The immortal unfading inheritance is reserved in heaven for them, who are kept by the power of God thro' faith unto salvation. Heaven is reserved for them, and they are kept for it: so that possession is sure. And in this they may greatly rejoice, even in the midst of their present heaviness. Especially considering,

(3.) That e're long faith shall be turned into sight, and they shall enter upon *the possession* of what may be now said to be theirs in hope and title only. But a few more wearisom days and restless nights; but a few more conflicts with satan, the world, and the flesh, and their warfare shall be accomplished, and they shall *enter into the joy of their Lord.*

With such thoughts as these, believers are sometimes raised above themselves, so that as a giant refreshed with wine, they are prepared with joy to follow the Lamb, through poverty, prisons, reproaches and death, to arrive at the full possession of that glory that lies before them.

Lastly, From the heavenly felicity, faith is furnished with answers to all the temptations of satan, and the murmurings of the flesh; and being so enabled, the believer with courage and constancy holds on to the end, whatever difficulties are cast in the way. If tempted to backslide

a time of trial, and not to follow a naked, rejected, despised Christ; it being like to cost him all that is dear to him in the world. How readily may a believer argue, What is all this that the world calls great or good, to what God hath laid up in the other state? Who can be a loser that gets safe to heaven, though he has not on earth where to lay his head? If we are apt to question God's love, or repine, or sink under his heavy hand, under the various and fore trials, and of long continuance he may sometimes meet with, the believer may take up the *Psalmist's* words, and say, *Why art thou cast down, my Soul? why art thou disquieted within me?* If in this life only I had hope in Christ, I might possibly yield myself to be miserable; but who can do so that hopes *to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living?* What are a few days, though full of evil, to the endless ages I shall have to enjoy my happiness in?

And grant that I am denied the enjoyments of earth, and loaded with the sorest miseries in it: Yet how can I doubt of God's love, or think it small, who hath prepared for his people an unshaken kingdom, and is leading them to it? Though they go forth mourning, they shall ere long arrive at the heavenly *Sion* with everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Wherefore, begone all repinings: be still thou murmuring flesh: If thy complaints continue, I will not listen. As drawn on by ravishing glory, I am resolved to follow a crucified Jesus, through sorrow, sufferings, and death itself; being assured, I can be no loser, whilst I exchange

change only earth for heaven. No matter how troublesome the way, when everlasting rest is to be the end.

APPLICATION.

1. From the trials saints here meet with, learn the vanity of expecting peace on earth. They that do so, mistake a desert for *Canaan*, an howling wilderness for the promised land. Our first parents were long since expelled the earthly Paradise, and such a place is now no more to be found on earth by any of their off-spring: nothing but common accursed ground, a soil from whence briars and thorns naturally spring. This is the advice to be learnt from the sorrow sin hath let in upon this world. *Arise, here is not your rest.*

2. Be hence assured that there is an after-state, where God will distinguish between such as fear and serve him, and such as fear him not, in another manner than is done in this life. Here the wicked flourish, increase in riches, have more than heart can wish: whilst the best men are often in the worst condition, and that upon the account of their being so. For God's sake are they plagued all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter; but let none say, I have cleansed my heart in vain.

This is only the world of trial and probation preparatory to another, where things shall be put in better order, and every thing set at right that here seems to be amiss. That God is the *rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, is as true, as that he is. None shall obey him to his final prejudice; nor any harden themselves against him

and prosper in the end. This therefore is not the only, nor perfect state of things. The scene shall shortly be changed, and the eternal world appear: wherefore, says the Apostle, *It is a righteous thing with God to recompence tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled rest with us*, 2 Thes. i. 6, 7.

3. How great is our privilege by the gospel, by which life and immortality are set before us in so clear a light, that thence believers may fetch suitable supports to keep them from fainting under their sorest trials? Though godliness be attended with many sufferings, we are not left without relief.

It is said of *Egypt*, that as no country is more infested with venomous creatures, none does more abound with suitable Antidotes. As to saints, it may be truly said, no people are usually more afflicted than they, and none have better cordials at hand, did they know how to use them. Blessed be God for providing so richly, not only for our after happiness, but for our present support and comfort by the way to it.

Lastly, Make sure that you be born again for a better world, and tending to it; and then labour to keep faith in exercise upon *the goodness God hath laid up for them that love him*.

They must by a thorough change be made meet for heaven, who would enter thereinto. And this being once made in you, live by faith upon what you are going to enjoy. Whilst you are in the wilderness, often send your thoughts as spies to take a view of the good of the promised land.

When

When you find yourselves inclined to faint under the trials of your present state, the darkness and death that reigns below, look up by faith to the world of light and life above : frequently entertain yourselves with the prospect of it, converse much with it, fetch your strongest supports and encouragements from it. Rejoyce in hope of the glory of God whilst you live, and be not afraid by dying to enter into it.

Remember whom you have believed, and for what, and be faithful to him even to the death ; and then after a life of faith, you shall be ever present with him, and *see him as he is*, 1 John iii. 2.

S E R M O N II.

P S A L M XXXIX. 13.

*O spare me, that I may recover strength,
before I go hence, and be no more.*

IN these words we may conceive holy *David* standing, as it were, between both worlds ; upon the brink of time, and looking into eternity : and from the awfulness of the change, thus lifting up his soul in prayer to God, *O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*

We have here,

1. The request he makes, or what it is he earnestly prays for, *viz.* That God would grant him longer space in the present world, and that he might not be now removed, but continued awhile longer on this side death and the grave : *O spare me.*

2. The end for which he desires this, *That I may recover strength*, i. e. *strength* to meet and bear up under my dying lot, and go through the change I am to make with more tranquillity of mind : *Strength* to get my house in order, and my soul in frame and preparation for that,
for

for which upon a nearer view, I am more sensible than ever, the utmost that can be done, is little enough. *O spare me, that I may recover strength.*

3. The reason with which he urges his request, taken from the notion of death as it is an eternal farewell to the present state, a departure so as never to return : *Before I go hence, and be no more, i. e. No more in this world, or upon my tryal here, as I now am : No more in a capacity to finish the work of life, and prepare for death and eternity. If this be not done before this life ends, it can never afterwards be done.*

He that goes hence does not absolutely go out of being, so as to exist no more : But as he is a probationer for eternity, the time for this ends at death, and he is to be allowed as *such, no more opportunity for ever.*

Doct. *The consideration that at death we are to go from hence, so as to be here no more, is that which makes life upon earth of the greatest moment, and what even good men may sometimes pray to have continued a while longer, that they may be better prepared for their everlasting remove.*

This the *Psalmist* here does, from the consideration mentioned : having but one life wherein to prepare for an endless state, how earnest was he, that it might not conclude, till his work was finished ; as it was to be done now or never. *O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*

Here let us consider,

- I. The notion under which death is represented,
A going hence.

II. How, when once gone, we are to be no more.

III. Wherein our strength lies for going hence.

IV. How much we are concerned to pray that God would spare us, to get or recover strength preparatory to our final remove.

V. That this is the great thing good men have in their eye, in desiring life.

VI. When they may be led to pray that God would spare them.

Lastly, The use of the Whole.

I. The notion under which death is represented: it is a going hence, a departure out of this world, and from all the concerns and comforts of it, from having any thing more to do with it.

Of this we are often minded, as we are said to *have here no continuing city*, and that here is not our rest. Agreeably to this, *David* speaks of himself as *a stranger, and a sojourner*, one in motion to a more fixed state, *ver. 12. of this Psalm*. When we come into this world we are not to dwell or abide here, but to act a part for eternity, and then to remove and receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. God has set us here as in our passage to an after-state. Our journey begins as soon as born, and ends at death.

This is the way of all the earth, the way of all flesh. As surely as we had an entrance into the world, or are now in it, we are moving off again, and must ere long leave it for ever.

Man

Man goeth to his long home : This is true of every one of the race. We are all going hence, one as well as another. Every man shall draw after us, as there are innumerable gone before us.

Continually, whether we sleep, or wake, think of it, or not, every breath we draw, every pulse that beats, brings us nearer our end. Death is a wide and open door, through which multitudes are passing day and night. How thick have graves opened of late, and what numbers been hurried into them ? Within a week or two, what changes have been made by death in one family and another ? and they that yet survive, are in motion the same way, drawing nearer and nearer the end of time, and so to an expecting eternity.

We gradually decline and wear away. Every day and hour that has passed since we came into the world, has brought us so much nearer our departure ; and the number of our days that remains, is continually lessening. Through various changes and turns of life, we are approaching to the last and greatest change of all, when by death we are to change worlds, and go out of time into eternity.

The young man is walking on to this with an upright face ; aged persons are going to the same end, stooping downward to the earth ; and poor infants are tending to it, before they can go, beginning to die, as soon as they begin to live.

We are going hence very *swiftly* : There is a time to be born and a time to die ; and how

soon is the space between passed over ! Some indeed make a shorter stay, and are sooner gone than others, but all make haste. *My days, saith Job, are swifter than a post : they flee away. They are passed away as the swift ships : as the eagle that hasteth to the prey,* Job. ix. 25, 26. Upon this account, our life in scripture, is compared to a vapour, that appeareth a little while, and then vanisheth away. *Man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down : he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not,* Job. xiv. 2. *As for man, his days are as grass : as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more.* Some by sudden diseases, or unexpected accidents are speedily removed : But they whose lives are drawn to the longest date, may say as *David, Thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee.*

We are going swiftly, and when the time is come, most *certainly* and *unavoidably*. It is appointed unto man once to die ; and the bounds are set which none can pass. This is a truth of which we have frequent affecting instances, as warnings that our turn is coming, our turn to leave this world, as they have done : and that it will be e'er long said of us as it is of them, *They are dead and gone.* How delightful soever we may count the present world ; how willing soever of a longer stay, especially when our circumstances are easy and prosperous, when death comes, we must away. The sentence of death passed on fallen man, is
irrever-

irreversible: though the sting of it to believers is taken out by Christ, all must feel its stroke, and be thereby removed. Saints must thus go hence: how else shall they be happy in being with the Lord. Their heavenly Father will call them home, from a world of labour and suffering, to everlasting rest. And as the righteous shall go hence, to be rewarded; so the wicked shall be taken away, to be punished.

No exemption from this can be purchased, whatever should be offered. *They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother (or himself) nor give to God a ransom: that he should live for ever. Wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others; and removing out of this world, take their flight to an unchangeable state, Psalm xlix. 6, &c.*

So much for the first thing: death is a departure from the present world.

II. How, when once gone, may we be said to be no more?

This is not to be understood as if our being should be extinguished, or either soul or body lost. No; the soul is immortal, and capable of endless joy or misery, and enters into the one or the other, upon its remove from hence. The body also shall be fetched up from the grave, at the general resurrection, and solemnly sentenced to share with the soul, in blessedness or torment for ever.

But

But we shall be no more in a state of probation, either by returning to this world, or enjoying those means or advantages for it in another, which here we are taken from.

1. No more restored to live on earth, to make a new choice for eternity, or do the work preparatory to it, that was not finished before we were called away. This is the day and state in which we are to work out our salvation, and endeavour to make our calling and election sure. Happy they, who while the season lasts, finish the work on which eternity depends. But they with whom it is gone over in vain, will no more be favoured with its return.

If importunity could prevail how earnestly would they beg and cry for this? What passionate requests would they put up? O that we might be permitted again to live upon earth, in a state of hope, and under the means of grace we once enjoyed! O that we might again see one of the days of the Son of man, and therein hear the joyful sound; feel the strivings of the blessed Spirit; have former opportunities and helps restored, to make better preparation for an endless life, than once we did! But this shall not be. One life is appointed to us on earth, wherein to flee from the wrath to come, and make sure of heaven and eternal glory; and they that lose this, shall not be favoured with another. They that now will not hear, and pray, and watch, and strive, shall, when this life is at an end, have no more opportunity for any of these.

A life

A life of trial on earth once over, is no more to begin. If we go hence unholy and unprepared, before our great work is done, or our souls safe, we are to come back no more, to do what was left undone, or rectify what was done amiss. In the present life, the carnal may be renewed, the guilty pardoned, the perishing saved: enemies to God may be reconciled, and they that are afar off may be brought nigh. This we are not only invited to, but have the greatest helps and advantages for: but all this ends at death, as by this we depart once for all from the present state. On the other side of death, it will be in vain to cry, Lord send us again to earth, to hear the voice of mercy, and have the tenders of life and salvation by Christ, and we will not neglect and make light of all, as once we did. Such cries could they be made, would be immediately silenced with the cutting reply, 'Tis now too late.

If ever we make provision for death, judgment and eternity, it must be whilst this life lasts, it being no more to be restored.

2. Sinners that are removed unchanged, shall not again, in an after-state, be favoured with the like means and advantages which they enjoyed here. Death transmits us to judgment, which determines our eternal state without possibility of change. This is the life of trial and preparation; the next of reward or punishment, according as we carried it here. There is no repentance in hell, nor call to it; no believing in a Saviour, in order to their release from that place of torment, and obtaining everlasting life.

They that here made sure of heaven, shall at death be admitted into it, and go out no more : they that, notwithstanding the offers of a Saviour, died in their sins, are cast into the prison of hell, from whence there is no redemption.

No messengers are to be sent after lost sinners from this to the next world ; no hope of mercy is to be vouchsafed them there. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation ; but it concludes with the sinners last breath. If a man dies shall he live again, *i. e.* in such a state as this ? It is apparent to all, it cannot be, *Job* xiv. 14. Probationers for an after-state, when they go hence *shall be no more* here. Here-upon,

III. Wherein lies our strength for going hence ?

The answer to this is obvious. Being to remove out of time into eternity, our strength for this consists in our *readiness* for a blessed eternity ; that so it may go well with us in the next world, whenever we are taken out of this. And this readiness *in general*, consists in having an interest in Christ the only Saviour, and through him, in being in a state of peace with God, before whom we are going to appear. It consists *particularly*, in having our sins done away in the blood of the Lamb ; our natures healed by the power of his Spirit ; grace accompanying salvation in exercise ; comfortable evidence of a title to heaven, and meetness for it ; and so a lively hope that we shall change for the better, whenever removed from hence. These
are

are the things that make up our strength for our long journey, and enable us to go through the valley of the shadow of death, and fear no evil.

It cannot but be delightful to hold our thoughts a little upon them. In general our strength for dying or going hence, is when we have an interest in Christ the only Saviour, and are through him in a state of peace with God, before whom we are going to appear, and are among the happy number that shall find mercy of the Lord in that day. From the very mention of this, we may learn what strength there lies in it for our going hence, and how weak and discouraged, faint and feeble, we must be without it. Well may that soul tremble and be afraid, when ready to take its flight into the other world, that is going to appear before an angry Judge, and having no relation to Christ, the only Mediator, to plead for him. But with what safety and satisfaction may the penitent believer depart; being to go to God as a Father through Jesus Christ, the most potent and prevalent advocate with him? *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect, now, or at the last day? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us,* Rom. viii. 33, 34.

This is our strength in general for going hence.

Particularly, We may be said to be ready to go hence,

I. When

1. When our sins are done away in the blood of the Lamb. We go hence to be judged. Now when sin lieth at the door, no wonder if we have little ability or inclination to go forth. Unpardoned guilt shakes the confidence of the departing soul, and fills it with horror, as about to appear naked and defenceless before an angry God. But when sin is pardoned in the blood of Jesus, the soul is prepared, and so strengthened for a remove: having no guilt to keep him out of heaven, and having a prevailing Advocate attending, to plead for his admission thither.

2. We may be said to be prepared, and so strengthened for going hence, when our nature is healed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.* And where this heart is found, the person is disposed for a happy remove. Impure souls will be carried downward by the weight of corruption as well as guilt; but they that are born from heaven, are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, and so may sweetly mount upward to take possession.

3. Grace accompanying salvation in vigorous exercise, is a farther addition to our strength for a remove. When repentance, faith, hope and love are excited, and set a work by the hand by which they were first implanted, the soul is dressed to meet its Lord. This is intimated in our Lord's Command of *having our loins girt, and our lights burning, like men that wait for their Lord.*

4. Com-

4. Comfortable evidence of our title to, and meetness for heaven, that so upon our being absent from the body, we have good hope we shall be present with the Lord: this, this will furnish us with strength, not only to submit to a remove, but in some measure to desire to be gone. Being able to say, *I know that my Redeemer liveth*, and that he is gone to his Father, and my Father, to prepare for my coming; how readily will one raised to this, welcome the order to go and be with him, though it be by dying? Upon notice given to a saint by some mortal disease or danger, that he must set his house in order, for that he shall die and not live, with what satisfaction in the divine will, will he receive the message, as being able to say, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course.* I have done my work, and I have a prospect of my reward: *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge will give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* Lord Jesus receive my soul: Angels do your office, and bear me to him.

In such things as these lies our strength for a final departure out of this world into another. And hence, it is easy to collect, who have reached it.

They that have yielded themselves to God through Jesus Christ, and are restored to the favour God bears to his own people: They who are pardoned and renewed; washed, justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Christ, and by the Spirit of God: they who have grace implanted, and growing by exercise: they who have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts; who have their evidences for heaven clear, and some foretastes of what it means. Where it is thus, those happy souls may be said to have reached a good measure of strength for their remove hence.

This leads me to consider,

IV. How much we are concerned to pray, that God would spare us to get or recover strength, preparatory to our final remove.

I. Strength consisting in *habitual readiness*, by obtaining an interest in Christ, and pardon and sanctification by his blood and Spirit, is necessary to our safe departure.

How terrible must be the thoughts of dying, to the man that is not at peace with God? How dreadful to appear before God, for one that is liable to his wrath? What hope can there be of heaven, where there is nothing of grace and holiness to fit for it? Is it not of the last importance when life is threatened, for such to beg its continuance? What heart has that man who considers what it is to die unrenewed, and in this state does not earnestly pray, *Lord spare me?* Cut me not off in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity; unmeet for heaven, when there remains no other place but hell. If I die in this state I am lost for ever: glorify thy patience in sparing a little, and thy grace in preparing me for my great change. This is *the strength* I need, and beg with all the vehemence of one that knows his safety as
I to

to eternity, depends upon it. Who can dwell with devouring fire? Who can endure everlasting burnings? *Spare me a little, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*

2. Strength, as it respects *grace in exercise*, and satisfaction as to our interest in Christ, and title to heaven: this is necessary to our dying comfortably, and finishing our course with joy.

And how earnestly should we be concerned for time, in order to get this? considering it will be far from being easy to go from hence never to return, uncertain what shall become of us for ever. To believe there is an everlasting hell, and be in doubt, whether I shall be delivered from it: a state of glory, and not to know, whether I shall be received into it: To be entering upon my unchangeable state, and at a loss of what kind it shall prove; how dejecting must this be? And on the other hand, how transporting will it be, to be able to look to heaven, and say, my Father is there? To Christ, and at the same time be able to add, *I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day?* I am leaving the world, and I do it freely, knowing I shall have, in exchange, better and more enduring substance. Farewel earth, welcome heaven, where I shall dwell with my Lord for ever.

V. To get strength thus to go hence, is the great thing, good men have, and ought to have in their eye, in desiring life.

It was not to be rich, or great, or honourable, that the *Psalmist* here prayed for; but that he may recover strength, such strength as the change he was going to make called for, *viz.* that he might die safely, and that he might depart in peace, or die comfortably. And the children of God may, and ought, with submission to his will, to desire this:

1. That they may be fresh, and renewed instances, that when flesh and heart faileth, God can be the strength of his people's heart, by giving them a lively hope that he will be their portion for ever.

2. That Christ may be glorified in their death, as well as life, by making them more than conquerors over the king of terrors: he having loved and died for them, and enabling them to triumph in him, in whom they have righteousness and strength, and in whom all the house of *Israel* is to be justified and to glory.

That their grand enemy Satan may be the more signally baffled, when seeing them rejoice as dying, and going singing to glory, where he can never come.

4. That such as survive may have a cordial to reconcile them to their own removal, from the comfortable manner in which they see them go off.

5. That these may be encouraged too to trust the same Jesus, for all the grace they shall need living, or dying. And

6. *Lastly*, That they may be quickened to follow them in the same way, as ever they would go off in the same manner, and finish well.

There

There is one thing more under the doctrinal part, *viz.*

VI. When may a child of God be led to pray with the *Psalmist*, *O spare me?*

1. After some great or grievous fall; that so they may live to testify the truth of their repentance, and repair the dishonour which the glory of God, and their holy profession may have suffered through their transgression.

2. Under sad and sensible decays as to grace; that they recover the ground they have lost.

3. When deprived of the light of God's countenance; that they may not set in a cloud, or be snatched away under darkness or doubt of their relation to him, or acceptance with him; that they may not sadden the hearts of those that God would not have to be saddened, nor leave the enemies of God any ground to imagine, That there was no difference between the death of the righteous and the wicked, tho' it be said, *The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death*, Prov. xiv. 22.

If it be asked, To what purpose should any put up the request, *Lord, spare me*, when prayer cannot change God's mind, or set death and the grave at a greater distance? The answer is obvious.

1. We may, and ought to pray, whilst we are uncertain as to the event. God knows the day of our death, but we do not; and his revealed will is to be our rule, who has said, *Is any afflicted? let him pray; Call upon me in the day of trouble, &c.* Psal. l. 15.

2. We are always to pray in submission to the will of God ; saying after the utmost importunity we have used, that God would not now take us away, *Not my will, but thine be done* : prepare me for whatever thou hast determined ; and here I am, do with me as seemeth best in thy sight.

3. It may be prayer is the means by which our lives are to be prolonged. God waits to be gracious to put an honour upon the duty he himself hath enjoyed, and encouraged our faith in. When it is lowest with us, his arm is not shortened, nor his ear heavy. And having lodged our request with him, we may humbly hope for answers of peace : or however that we shall be no losers by serious application to a throne of grace, as he said not to the seed of *Jacob*, Seek ye me in vain.

APPLICATION.

1. Must we at death bid adieu to all this world : how cautious should we be that we do not over-love or over-value it ; as that will make our parting with it the more difficult.

When it goes well with you, be not too much transported ; and let not affliction overwhelm and sink you.

Remember you must e'er long leave both the one treatment and the other ; and therefore are to be more concerned about the world you are going to, than that in which your stay is so uncertain and short.

2. How miserable are they who have their portion in the present life, which upon their going hence they must leave for ever ?

3. When

3. When gone from hence are we to come back no more, how much are we concerned before-hand, to make provision for, and send our best concerns before-hand into that state, in which we are to dwell for ever?

If our lives have been in danger and spared, let us endeavour to answer the end by labouring after strength necessary to our dying safely and comfortably: that when others upon receiving the sentence of death, cry bitterly, *O spare*; upon the notice that Christ is coming to call for you, you may say, *Amen, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.*

S E R M O N III.

PSALM XXIV. 10.

-----*But they that seek the Lord shall
not want any good thing.*

THE belief of God's taking a special care in his providence to supply the wants of good men, conduceth highly to the comfort of such in their walking with him : and that they have ground for such a faith, it is evident from the words of the text.

Doct. *God will so provide for those that sincerely seek him, that they shall not want any thing that be their heavenly Father knows to be good for them.*

And what more reviving news can be heard amidst the straits to which they are often reduced ? That therefore we may apply comfort to whom comfort is due, I shall

- I. Lay down the characters of the persons here spoken of, *They that seek the Lord.*
- II. Open the endearing promise made to such, *viz. That they shall not want any good thing.*
- III. Shew by what this promise is to be measured.

IV. The

IV. The grounds from whence its certain accomplishment may be inferred.

I. Let us lay down the character of the persons here spoken of, *They that seek the Lord.*

In general they that do this, are such as are born of God : and so seek him,

1. As one in whose favour their life is bound up. This is the sense of soul in which they are breathing after him. *Pf. lxxiii. 25. Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* Without God I cannot but be miserable, whatever else I enjoy : in him I have enough to my compleat felicity, though stripped of all things else. I envy not their happiness who can say of crowns and kingdoms, they are mine ; while I can look to heaven, and say of him that has his throne there, He is mine. Nothing short of him can satisfy ; and besides him, I can need no more.

2. They that seek God, seek him in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone they can find him to their comfort ; as in him alone he hath declared himself well-pleased.

3. They that seek God, do it in obedience to his command, and upon the encouragement of his promise, that he will not leave them to seek him in vain. A new heart is given them, the temper of which is this way discovered. *Psalms xxvii. 8. When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, O Lord, will I seek.* The word of God is their warrant for seeking after him : his word of precept makes it their duty, and his word of promise is the

ground of their hope that it shall not be lost labour; as *he said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain*, Isa. xlv. 19.

4. They that seek God, do it in the use of all the means he has appointed, and cannot be content or easy if they miss of him in the use of them. Ordinances in their account are valuable things, and what none can prize more than they; but these cannot be to them instead of God, and therefore, in attending upon them this is their language, expressive of their inward sense, *Psalms xlii. 1, 2. As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.* The duty, the ordinance, the time and place in which they meet with God, is sweet indeed, leading them to say in a holy transport, *This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven*: and afterwards to reflect upon it with a peculiar delight. And when they experience nothing of this, they truly mourn.

5. They that seek God, do it with the whole heart. This the *Psalmist* professes for himself, who was one of them, *Psalms cxix. 10.* And to this the promise of finding him is made. *Jeremiah xxix. 13. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

6. They that seek God aright, persevere therein. Though he hide his face, or seem to frown, they seek him still, and are resolved to do so. They are sensible they have as much need of God as ever, and he has as
much

much to recommend him. From what acquaintance they have had with him, they would fain know him better, and love him more, and have fuller foretastes of his love to them ; and they will never give over seeking after him for that end.

7. They that seek God, do it in dependance upon the grace and influence of his own Spirit ; as knowing that they cannot draw nigh to God but by him.

Lastly, They that seek God here below, do it in faith and hope of seeing him above. This is that which animates all their endeavours, and keeps them from fainting, while put to wait. They bless God for all the instances of his goodness they here experience : But, believe that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart to conceive, what God hath laid up for them that love him : Upon this therefore their hearts are ultimately placed, and after this their desires run.

It is the language of one of this temper, *Thy loving-kindness, O Lord, is better than life* ; and what I have sometimes found and felt of this, I would not have been without, for all the delights of time and sense : I esteem a day in thy courts better than a thousand any where else, *and had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness*. But how often is my communion with thee interrupted, the light of thy countenance withdrawn, and my joy dashed ; and when it is best with me, how far short is all of heaven ? Now therefore, Lord, what wait I for ? My hope is in thee, my expectations from thee :

thee : O let me not always be left in so dark and imperfect a state. I am waiting for thy salvation, and desirous to see it : O draw me nearer to thee ; refresh my soul with clearer discoveries of thyself : and when by grace thou hast fitted me for heaven, from imperfect communion with thee here, receive me to the full, everlasting and satisfying enjoyment. *This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O God of Jacob, Psal. xxiv. 6.*

Having seen the characters of the persons that may be said to seek God.

II. Let us guide our thoughts to the endearing comprehensive promise made to such : *They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.*

This is the mind of their heavenly Father, whose power is infinite, whose goodness is boundless, and whose mercy endureth for ever.

Here I might consider such as seek God, as to the variety of cases they may be in, and shew how abundantly their heavenly Father hath provided for them, in performance of his promise that they shall not want any thing that is good.

I. They shall not want the light of God's countenance any longer, or to any sorer degree than he shall see to be good for them. This is what they highly value, desire, and seek above all things in the world. *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us, Psal. iv. 6.* And herein their desires shall be answered, *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance doth behold the upright, Psal. xi. 7.*

As a sun he will reveal himself to holy souls, and by shining into them, put more gladness in their hearts than others experience, in the time
that

that their corn and wine are increased ; and hereby lead them not only to say, but to *taste and see that the Lord is good*, Psalm xxxiv. 8. *There is no want to them that fear him*, ver. 9.

Iniquity may separate between us and our God, and our sins hide his face from us : But *the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous*, ver. 15. And the promise stands firm : *Blessed are the pure in heart ; for they shall see God*, Matt. viii. 5. See him reconciled to them through his Son, and walk in the light of his countenance, as being so. *The secrets of the Lord is with them that fear him*, Ps. xxv. 14. In the experience of which, they have found it eminently fulfilled, That they that seek him shall not want any thing that is good.

2. They shall not want the protection of his arm. The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself : And *he that dwelleth in the secret of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*, Psal. xci. 1. Their habitation is a sacred inclosure, to which no evil shall approach, that God will not over-rule for good.

3. Whatever trials they meet with, they that seek God shall not want his presence with them, to support them under them, and over-rule them for their good. These he will use as means to mortify corruption, and take away sin ; wean them from the world, and deaden them to it ; exercise their graces in order to their increase, and so promote their meetness for the heavenly glory. In the mean time, when brought into the wilderness of trouble, thus comfortably he speaks to them : *Isaiah xxvii. 8, 9. Fear thou not, for I am with thee : be not dismayed, for I am thy God : I will*

strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right-hand of my righteousness, Isa. xli. 10.

Though no chastening is for the present joyous, but grievous : nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them that are exercised thereby, Heb. xii. 11. In regard to which, they put their afflictions to the account of God's faithfulness, as mindful of his word, and acting according to it, *Psf. cxix. 75. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*

4. They shall not want seasonable deliverance from what they groan under. *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, 2 Pet. ii. 9. and hath graciously promised it. Psf. xci. 15. I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him. Many are the afflictions of the righteous : but the Lord delivereth him out of them all, Psal. xxxiv. 29.*

5. They shall not want the special conduct of providence directing their steps, when in the most perplexing difficulties and straits. *What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall chuse, Psal. xxv. 12. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous, Prov. ii. 7. He preserveth the way of his saints, declaring, I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go : I will guide thee with mine eye, Psalm xxxii. 8.*

And how sweet has it been for those, who have fought the Lord, and waited for him, to look upon his kind appearances for them ! how frequently he hath scattered their doubts, and been better than their fears ; removed their burdens, answered
their

their prayers, succeeded their endeavours, satisfied their desires, and exceeded their hopes! *Who so is wise, and will observe things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord*, Ps. cvii. 43.

6. They shall not want necessary provision and supply in times of the greatest distress. As the children of God *dwell on high*, in point of safety; *so bread shall be given them*, and their water shall be sure, *Isai. xxxiii. 16*. The Psalmist concludes upon grounds common to all *Israelites* indeed, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*. The righteous shall have good things in possession, *Prov. xxvii. 10*. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time; and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied, *Ps. xxxvii. 19*.

7. They that seek the Lord shall not want the privilege of coming with acceptance to the throne of grace, and spreading their case before him. *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight*, *Prov. xv. 8*. He is well pleased with their approaches to him; pities them as a father pities his children; understands their request, how imperfectly soever uttered, and is ready to supply their wants, according to his riches in glory thro' Jesus Christ.

8. They that seek the Lord as going through this world to eternity, shall be guided by his counsel, even unto death, and afterwards received unto his glory. And even in the evening time, when God sees it good for them, it shall be light with them; and when flesh and heart are about to fail, God will be the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever, *Psal. lxxxiii. 26*.

These

These are some of the encouraging things contained in the promise made to them that seek God, *that they shall not want any good thing.*

I now proceed to shew,

III. By what such a promise as this is to be measured, *That they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.*

This is necessary upon the account of the objection that may be made from the variety of trials, which such as are dear to God, and sincerely seek him, often labour under. Their case is sometimes sad, and leads them with deep sense to say as the *Apostle*, *If in this life only we had hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable,* 1 Cor. xv. 19.

But however, They that seek the Lord shall want nothing that is good here on earth, *i. e.*

I. So far as is suitable to their present imperfect state, out of which they are gradually recovering. And thus God fulfils his promise, though he bestow not all that is desirable upon his children; this not being the place of our compleat felicity and rest. A place of unmixed enjoyment of all good, and perfect freedom from all evil is the description of heaven, and not to be expected on this side it.

To have light without darkness, ease without pain, health without sickness, plenty without all want, holiness without sin, and life without death, is reserved for the promised land, and what our condition in a wilderness will not admit.

To have no sorrow, sufferings, fears, or straits; no enemies, temptations, weariness, or wants: To have every desire filled up, and all matter of
com-

complaint removed, is the privilege of those who have finished their travels, and are called home by their heavenly Father, to take possession of the inheritance prepared for them. And while we are followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises, if we have enough to our safety and subsistence, direction and progress, we want nothing of good belonging to our infant unsettled state, and suitable to it.

2. They that seek the Lord shall want nothing that is good, with reference to the great design he is carrying on, *viz.* his own glory, and his people's salvation; which all his proceedings towards them, make way for, and shall issue in. And thus he performs his promise, notwithstanding the troubles wherewith his servants are sometimes exercised. Afflictions are grievous, and so not desirable in themselves: But yet as they have an influence reaching to eternity, and as they tend to promote the divine honour, and our everlasting blessedness, they are matter of our rational choice now, and will be of our thankfulness and praise hereafter.

Moses having respect to the recompence of reward, chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of *Egypt*, Heb. xi. 25. For our light afflictions that are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17. *By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin*, Isa. xxvii. 9. We are chastened of the Lord,

Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world ; that we may be made partakers of his holiness, and so prepared to behold his face in glory.

Now what are the great things we should desire, were it put to our choice, but to be delivered from sin the worst of evils, and from hell the deepest misery ? To obtain salvation with eternal glory, that God may be everlastingly honoured in our everlasting happiness ? And if he over-rules his various dispensations to this end, though some of them are harsh and severe, how plain is it that those with whom he deals thus, want nothing that is good ? And with what thankfulness shall we acknowledge this, when we are well instructed in the method of grace to bring us to glory ? We shall confess with wonder and joy, That it was good for us that we were afflicted, and that in very faithfulness God did it.

How pleasing a scene will it be at last to behold the excellent counsels and designs of wisdom extending to all the circumstances and turns of life ? That this way we were to go ? Through such straits and trials to be led ? By such means and methods to be brought into the divine favour, and kept in it ? By such crosses and afflictions to be saved from pride, weaned from earth, kept back from sin, excited to duty, and a diligent pursuit of heaven ? Which have all been observed, and with a steady hand guided to a blessed issue. With what triumph shall we use the words of the Psalmist, as fulfilled : *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life :*

life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, Psal. xxiii. 6.

Though I was led through a howling wilderness where I was often ready to murmur upon account of the straits I was in, or the dangers I was encompassed with, I find it was the best way to the promised Land. I now perceive the reason, and the need I had of the various dispensations of providence towards me, the usefulness of all the hard circumstances I was in, how nothing was omitted or could be spared, how well and wisely all things were over-ruled for my eternal good : And now, adored be that wisdom that watched over me, and directed my steps ; that mercy and goodness that chose my state for me, and attended me therein ; that power that kept me from falling, strengthened me in weakness, delivered me from every evil work, and preserved me to his heavenly kingdom. *How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God ? how great is the sum of them ? They are more in number than the sand.*

3. They that seek the Lord shall want nothing that is good, with respect to the service he calls them to, the work they have to do, and the part they are to act for him in the world : And so the promise is fulfilled, though he does not give to all his servants alike. By some he will be honoured in a higher, by others in a lower station ; and accordingly to one he gives ten talents, to another two. Now whatever he sees fit to bestow on me, his will and wisdom are to measure my desires, as knowing the fittest proportion for me. And if I honour him

less by my substance, I am to honour him more by my patience and humble submission to his will; and having food and raiment, which is all that is absolutely necessary, therewith I am to learn to be content.

4. They that seek the Lord shall want nothing that is good, as it shall become seasonable: And so he fulfills his word, though he does not presently or all at once bestow all the good he intends. His sovereign will is to determine the time and order, as well as the measure of our mercies.

The *Israelites* in the wilderness, when fed with *Manna*, had nothing denied them that was good, though they had no more than would last them from day to day; to teach them to live in a constant dependence upon God, and as their wants returned, to look up to heaven, from whence supplies were to be sent in the fittest season. And how tasteful must those mercies be, that descend fresh out of the hand of God?

Lastly, They that seek the Lord shall want nothing that is good, either in kind, or in value; in outward comforts, or in inward content with the divine disposal and allowance. *Godliness with contentment is great gain*, 1 Tim. v. 6. If God denies the joy of harvest, and gives the joy of the Holy Ghost; if he suffers men to be in outward trouble, and gives them that peace that passeth understanding, who can say he deals hardly with them, or that they want any thing that is good?

To remove our burdens, or else increase our strength: To answer our desires in taking off an affliction, or say, *My grace is sufficient for thee*:

To

To give us riches, honours, friends and possessions, or contentment, which is equivalent: To supply us mediately, or immediately; continue the streams, or lead us to the fountain, in either way, he fulfils his promise. *I have learnt*, saith the Apostle, *in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*, Phil. iv. 11. He knew God would supply all the believers need according to his riches in glory, by Jesus Christ, *ver.* 19.

Hence this is the representation he gives of his own and his fellow ministers state, *As dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things*: They having the Author of all, God all-sufficient for their portion, 2 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

Thus they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.

Hence I go on to consider,

IV. From what grounds the certain accomplishment of this promise may be inferred.

And here how many things may be offered, as encouragements to the faith and trust of such as seek God. As,

First, The endearing relations in which God stands to them.

1. He is their *shepherd*, and they are *his flock*. They are small indeed in number; but precious and honourable, by his esteem of them, his property in them, and his regard for them. He separated them from the rest of the world; formed them for his praise in this world, and for his kingdom in another; and in their way to it, would have them trust him for all that is good

for them. Upon this the Psalmist places his rest. *Psalm xxiii. 1. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* The Lord is *my shepherd*; and though he has others to take care of, I shall be as well supplied, as if I were alone the object of his concern. The Lord is my shepherd, *I shall not want*: No, so far from that, that the provision he makes for those that belong to his flock, is fully answerable to the relation in which he stands to them. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

2. God is a father to those that seek him, and will pity, and provide for them as such. *Like as a father pitieth his children: so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,* Psalm ciii. 13. He considers their weakness, is acquainted with their wants, and withdraweth not his eye from the righteous. He has his ear open to hear their cries, and his hand full to satisfy their desires. With this argument Christ confirms the faith and trust of his disciples. *Matt. vii. 12.* which of you would withhold from his craving son what is convenient and necessary for him? And if you that are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask him?*

To scatter their doubts, and give the fullest assurance of this, hear his own words, *Isai. xlv. 16. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.* And his love to every one of his people, exceeds that of the most affectionate mother to her tender infant: *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not*

not forget thee. And can I think of being remembered by my Father in heaven, remembered with the favour he bears unto his own, and not see reason to conclude, that as *seeking him*, I shall not want any thing that is good?

3. Consider the Most High, as a God to his people; and what strong reason then have they to expect from him all that is good? As he is a Being of all possible perfections, and as he is theirs in an everlasting covenant, This is the joyful sound which all those are blessed that hear, and are concerned in, *I will be your God, and ye shall be my people*. And what may not people expect from a God, who is their own? considering,

(1.) That known unto the Lord are all the wants of his people. He appoints the bounds of their habitation, and knows where to visit them, and daily hears from them. Nay, he is always present with them, and in a day of trouble has especially engaged to be so. *Isa. xliii. 2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee, &c.*

(2.) That he is concerned for, and exercises a particular providence about the generation of them that seek him. The Lord knoweth them that are his. Their wants and straits, their fears and dangers, their work and way, he observes with a special regard to all the circumstances they may be in; as an indulgent parent observes his children, that he may suit his mercies to their various needs. Even the very hairs of every righteous man's head are all numbered; so exact is the care of God about them, *Matth. x. 30.*

(3.) That from his infinite fullness of power and goodness, he is able to furnish his people with all that is good. What can they want, but God all-sufficient can easily bestow? With what comfort may they seek to him, with whom is the fountain of life? He who every day feeds and sustains the whole world, satisfies angels, and is his own happiness, can surely do exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think.

He can supply all my wants of soul or body, present, or to come; bestow all mercies which the exceeding great and precious promises of his word contain, and which any of my requests built upon them, and encouraged by them, can crave. And he ever lives to do so; being *the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

4. He hath encouraged the hope of those that seek him, by solemn asseveration and oath, concerning what he will do for them. *Psf. xxxii. 3. Trust in the Lord, and do good, &c. and verily thou shalt be fed. Jer. xxxii. 41. I will rejoyce over them to do them good, &c. with my whole heart, and with my whole soul.*

These are some of the encouragements which they that seek God, have to believe that they shall not want any thing that is good for them.

To which we may add,

5. His extensive care over creatures of a lower nature. This is the argument which our Lord himself uses to repress undue solicitude in his followers, as to the necessities of life, *Matt. xxvi. 25. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on, ver. 26.*

Behold

Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Ver. 26, 29, 30. Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so cloath the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more cloath you, O ye of little faith?

6. *Lastly, The transcendent instance of the love of God in the gift of his Son, may encourage the faith of his people, that they shall not want any thing that is good for them. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Rom. viii. 32.*

APPLICATION.

How happy is their state who can make it out to themselves, that they belong to the generation of them that seek the Lord, and what strong consolation may they draw from the promise made to such, that they shall not want any good thing? How chearfully may they follow, where God leads, and how firmly trust him amidst all discouragements or gloomy aspects, spiritual, or temporal? How divine a calm may reign in their breasts? *What man is he that feareth the Lord? His soul shall dwell at ease, Psal. xxiv. 12, 13.* It has reason to do so; as *all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant, and his testimonies, ver. 10.*

Let the sincere seeker of God humbly take up the resolution, although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation, *Hab. iii. 17, 18.*

Though the sun should be darkened, and the moon should not give her light, the Lord will be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory. *Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? Why art thou so disquieted within me? Psal. xliii. 5.*

SER-

SERMON IV.

PSALM LXXIII. 23.

*Nevertheless I am continually with thee,
thou hast holden me by my right-hand.*

THESE are the words of the holy *Psalmist* just recovering out of a very sore and deep distress, which in the foregoing verses he at large describes, with the occasion of it.

Before he mentions any thing of his trial, he lays down this as an undoubted principle, *Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.* However such as these may seem neglected, or severely dealt withal by him ; whatever hard thoughts they may be tempted to give way to, they have reason to believe, and will be brought to own at last, that *truly God is good to his Israel ; peculiarly, savingly, everlastingly good to such as are of a clean heart.*

Having laid down this as his ground upon which to justify God, he declares how sorely he had been shaken, from observing the unequal distributions of providence, in the outward prosperity of sinners, and the affliction of God's saints. *But as for me, my feet were almost gone,*

my steps had well nigh slipt; ver. 2. My faith and hope in God's promises and providence were staggered, and I could scarce keep my ground: seeing the enemies of heaven in the most flourishing condition upon earth, I was ready to throw up all religion, as standing in the way of my happiness. *For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked*, ver. 3. The instances of this he sets down, with the effect they had upon him. *There are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men: neither are they plagued like other men*, ver. 4, 5. They are often strong and healthful while they live, and then are removed by a natural and easy death; have their days filled with plenty and pleasure, though by all, they grow worse and worse, and give themselves a greater scope in sinning, even to the blaspheming of God, as well as abusing of his servants: *Behold these are the ungodly who prosper in the world, they increase in riches*. These are the men, and this is their condition, a prosperous one. Upon which, he was tempted to make this strange conclusion, *viz.* That all that he had done in religion was lost labour. *Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency*; i. e. there being no difference made in my case, unless for the worse: *For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning*, ver. 13, 14.

And though he does not allow himself to break out in such language as this, lest he should condemn the people of God; yet he could not get over the difficulty, or obtain satisfaction why
 God

God should deal thus, from any reason of his own. *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me. Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end,* ver. 16. If ever we would have our scruples answered, and our doubts effectually removed, it must be by God's teaching; and for this we are to wait where he is wont to be found, *viz.* in the *sanctuary*. There consulting the oracles, and attending the ordinances of God, the *Psalmist* had his mind calmed: as being taught,

1. That this world is only a state of trial and preparation in order to another: whence, no wonder that seemingly unequal distributions are made to saints and sinners, as if God had crossed hands, and mistook his enemies for his servants; but it is nothing less.

2. Sinners are not presently punished, nor the righteous rewarded; because God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and would train up his people in the faith and expectation of it, and leave those inexcusable who live as if it would never be.

3. The time is short both of the wicked's triumph, and the saints sufferings, and will soon be over. The scene shall be e'er long changed, and in the next state things shall be put into better order, and all that set right which here seems so much amiss.

4. What sinners have in hand is their portion. They have their good things here; all that ever they are like to have. Upon their leaving the present world, they must leave their happiness too; and how soon, how suddenly

may they be snatched away into a world, where nothing remains to them but endless torments? *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; where, Who would desire to stand? Thou castedst them down into destruction:* upon which he that here looked upon them with envy, could not but look after them with horror, and cry out, *How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment? They are utterly consumed with terrors.* And how little reason is there to repine at their empty short-lived happiness upon earth, in their way to an everlasting hell?

Nor need saints to sink under their present sufferings, or think themselves hardly used; the sufferings of the present time, not being worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed: and the light afflictions of the present life, working for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, *Rom. viii. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 17.*

5. How little appearance soever there is of this, or of preparation for it at present, *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the Godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished, 2 Peter ii. 9.* And then their imaginary felicity will all vanish, and be exchanged for real misery. *As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*

Having learned such things as these by being in the sanctuary, the *Psalmist* looks back, and bewails his folly in being so far borne down, and almost overfet. *Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I,*
and

and ignorant : *I was as a beast before thee, i. e.* I looked no farther than present things, and was ready to judge by flesh and sense ; and so was unreasonably disquieted, if all things went not as I would have had them in the present life ; as if there were no *after state*, with reference to which all might be well accounted for.

This having been his case and carriage, he comes to shew in the result of all, how kindly he had been dealt with by God, in this his address to him in the text. *Nevertheless I am continually with thee : thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

To make way for what I design : in the words are considerable,

1. The state and character of the person speaking : one related to God, of the generation of his children ; but sorely shaken by a temptation, and almost overcome.

2. The temper he discovers upon his coming out of his distress, and the happiness he acknowledges he had enjoyed, by this his address to God, *I am continually with thee.*

3. When this was uttered, and upon what occasion : viz. after a fore temptation, and a deal of weakness betrayed under it. *Nevertheless, O Lord, I am continually with thee.* And how deeply does he appear affected in speaking thus ? *Nevertheless, i. e.* after all that has past, and notwithstanding all, when I was pressed so hard, and made to stagger to that degree, that I was just overthrown, and my feet almost gone ; when I was in the utmost danger, and upon the
brink

brink of ruin, *Nevertheless*, I now find I was *continually with thee*.

I, who was so foolish and ignorant, as to be ready to question and arraign thy perfections, dispute thy dealings, grow weary of thy service, grieve and fret, murmur and repine at thy providence, and judging by flesh and sense, *was even become as a beast before thee : Nevertheless* I was, and I *am continually with thee*. This has been my happiness, and still is ; how unworthy soever I am of it ; how often soever it has been forfeited ; whatever I have been and done, deserved and might expect. O the mercy, that it may be said of, and by such an one as I am, *I am continually with thee*. *With thee*, in whose favour is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life : whose presence is my best support on earth, and this fully revealed, will make up heaven. I can never forget the assaults I have passed through, and to what degree I have been foiled ; the faults and follies I have been chargeable with, for which I might justly have been cast off : but whilst I look back with shame and sorrow upon these, I must say with adoring thankfulness, *Nevertheless, I am still with thee*.

4. The Author of this, to whom all is ascribed, viz. to God. *Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. My feet were almost gone : my steps had well nigh slipped : but thou hast holden me by my right hand ; and so I am continually with thee*.

And what the *Psalmist* here speaks of himself, agrees to every one of the children of the kingdom,

kingdom, in their way thither. Hence we may observe from the whole.

That it is the duty and privilege of the people of God, notwithstanding the trials and infirmities of the present state, as upheld by his grace to be continually with him.

How forely soever they may be afflicted and tempted, shaken and staggered; as not knowing how to reconcile God's dealing with them to his love to them, they should not renounce and throw up their interest in him, nor conclude they are rejected by him. The *Psalmist's* expression takes in both, *Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.*

We shall here consider,

I. What is implied in being continually with God, *as a duty.*

II. View the same *as a privilege.*

I. What is implied in being continually with God, *as a duty.* As to the subjects of it, we must premise, that it is the proper work of the people of God: they, and they only are prepared for it, and disposed to it.

They are prepared for it, as having accepted and chosen God for *theirs*, and yielded themselves to him, and through Jesus Christ returned into a state of favour and reconciliation with him. Hereby all ground for slavish fear is removed, without the removal of which, sinners could have no satisfaction *in being with God*: for how can two walk together, except they be agreed? Amos iii. 3.

They

They are disposed to it, by resting in his word and promise, that the kingdom he has prepared for them that love him, will more than recompence all their sufferings in the way to it. The light afflictions that are but for a moment, *are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us. I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.* But in the faith and hope of this, having obtained help of God, I continue to this day. *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.* And being take up with this, whatever I have suffered, or may further be exercised with, *nevertheless I am continually with thee.*

Many things tend to engage the people of God in point of duty, thus to be with him.

1. It is God's express and solemn charge to the father of the faithful, in which every one of his children are concerned. *I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect,* Gen. xvii. 1.

2. Their covenant consent strengthens the obligation. This was their language when returning to God, and enquiring *the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten,* Jer. l. 5. And having opened their mouths unto the Lord, they are bound in faithfulness not to go back. This is confirmed as often as we go to the table of the Lord; where by taking of the bread, and drinking of the cup, we own our covenant relation to him,

him, and satisfaction in him, with a steady resolution never to change, but continue faithful to the death.

He invites us thither often, to know if we are of the same mind as when we first chose him, and entered into covenant with him; and to give us an opportunity to renew it. He there declares to every one of his people, that he stands to his promise of being their God in covenant, never to leave them or forsake them; and is willing to give them fresh pledges and assurances of it. And as the covenant is mutual, the believer when he receives the sacramental elements, on his part declares, *Lord I am thine*, thine more than my own; thine by an unquestionable right, and my own consent to it: I am devoted, resigned, given up to thee: I come here to own it; and call heaven and earth to witness, that by the assistance of thy grace, I resolve to stand to the agreement. Thy vows are upon me, O God: truly I am thy servant, I am thy servant, and resolve to be for ever so. I desire no greater honour upon earth, than to stand in so near a relation to thee, and disvalue all the world, in comparison of the blessedness reserved for those so related in heaven.

3. The honour of God, that which of all things is, and ought to be most dear to his people, obliges them to this. After they have solemnly given up themselves to him, and for a while walked with him, should they grow weary and turn back, what a reflection would it be upon God and his ways? It would speak

as if sinners had reason for their hard thoughts of both, and sin, and Satan, and the present world were better masters, and could do more for their followers, than God. The reproaches of them that should thus reproach him, would fall upon and wound their souls. And therefore a saint however staggered, when come to himself, from zeal for God's Glory, will be led to say, *Nevertheless, I am continually with thee.*

4. To this they feel the constraints of love. This cannot silently bear the absence of the object beloved, and is never better pleased than in the most intimate converse with it. To divert or call it off to any thing else, is to turn the needle from the pole, leaving it trembling and unsettled, till it find its desired point. After the staggering posture the *Psalmist* had been in, love to God makes him express himself with peculiar satisfaction, *Nevertheless I am continually with thee: Here, and here I am where I would be, in the presence and company that is all the world to me, and infinitely better. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee,* verse 25. of this psalm.

5. The experience the people of God have had of the advantage of being continually with him, and their loss by the contrary, is a farther obligation to this. A saint looking backward, has reason to say, it was always best with me when I kept closest to God: if ever I perceived grace to thrive, and corruption to decay in my soul, it was then: if ever I had peace
and

and comfort, hope and joy upon solid grounds, it was then : if ever I was raised above the world, and willing to leave it ; disengaged from the inordinate love of life, and fear of dying : If ever I could read my title to heaven clearly, and ever had any thing of the foretastes of it, it was when with the greatest watchfulness I kept close to God. And by withdrawing from him in any instance of duty, how hath my peace been broken, my spirit wounded, my hopes dashed, and my fears revived, under which I have been ready to sink ? O the difference between being continually with God, and growing strange to him. I am ashamed to think that my feet should be so near gone. How much of the brute did I discover, when ready to say, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency to no purpose ? But how sadly soever I stumbled, blessed be God, I was not left totally to fall. *Nevertheless I am still with thee.*

6. Believers are enabled seasonably to remember, that the trials of the present state that seem to discourage their steadiness in religion, will soon be over, and are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. Besides the supports and comforts of communion in hand, there is heaven in hope ; in the prospect of which they that have given up themselves to God, have the highest reason to abide with him.

7. The sincerity of the saints love to God, and choice of him, is to be evidenced by their continuing with him. It is in vain for any to

pretend themselves to have been of the number of his people, if upon meeting with difficulties they go over to the side of his enemies. The heart was never upright in yielding to him, that retracts its dedication, and turns quite away.

8. The people of God are concerned to abide with him, as they would not lose their work and crown, and expose themselves to greater wrath. To prevent this the caution is given, *2 John 8. Look to yourselves that we lose not those things, which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, God declares, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* And how fearful a thing is it to fall into the hands of the living God? The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: in a dread of which, the *Israelite* indeed will with purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord; and however staggered, come to this at length, *Nevertheless I am still with thee.*

These are some of the grounds on which the people of God are, and ought to be with him, as a duty.

II. This may be considered *as their privilege*: concerning which let me briefly shew,

1. Under what endearing characters the people of God are with him.

2. That it is a *privilege* belonging to every one of the number, and that at all times.

3. Their happiness herein.

4. To

4. To what it is owing, viz. to God's keeping his hold of them.

1. Under what characters the people of God may, *in point of privilege*, be said to be *with him*. These are obvious and endearing. Particularly,

1. They are continually with God, *'as the members of his Son*, ransomed by him at the dearest rate, and vitally united to him, and so of too great account to be neglected or left. When like sheep we had gone astray, lost God and ourselves, and were wandering in the ways of death, Christ came to seek and save that which was lost. He suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God: and in order to it, had a seed promised him, to whom he was appointed a quickening head; and he becomes actually such, to all that believe. With reference to them he declares, *I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing*, John vi. 36, 39. The Father commits them to Christ, as their redeemer and head: who whilst on earth faithfully discharged his trust, and when about to return to heaven, he affectionately committed to his Father again. *John xvii. 11. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee: Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name; those that thou gavest me I have kept. And they were left by Christ*

to his Father's keeping and care, under the engaging considerations, as *ransomed* by him, and *related* to him.

2. *Israelites* indeed are with God, *as his children*, renewed by his grace, and allied to his Son ; through whom he makes good his promise of being a Father to them, and receiving and owning them as his sons and daughters. They are created in Christ Jesus after his image : and by faith receiving him, and returning unto God by him, *to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name.* And the relation shall never be broken off.

3. They are disposed to it, as being renewed by the Spirit to God's image and likeness, and in Christ become the objects of his special love. Their natural aversion is cured, and from a new principle implanted, they are formed for converse with God, and breathe after it, as what they cannot live without.

As to such as these, their being continually with God, implies,

1. Having their minds engaged or taken up in serious thoughts of God, as their daily concern and work. The wicked are said to be far from God, as God is not in all their thoughts, *Psalms* x. 4. In opposition to such, the saints make conscience of filling their minds with him, and employing their daily, most free and delightful thoughts upon him : and though a great part of their time be spent herein, they find no reason to be weary, but by fresh application to the boundless object, promise themselves fresh delight.

light. *Psalms* civ. 34. *My meditation of him shall be sweet : I will be glad in the Lord, i. e.* when I can get near to him. And by whatever diverted, or interrupted for a time, to these meditations the holy soul returns, as to its element. *Psalms* cxxxix. 18. *When I awake, I am still with thee.*

2. Being with God must be understood with reference to the discoveries he hath made of himself in his word, and the relations in which he stands to us, under which he would be conceived of by us: and so his people are, and ought to be *with him*.

(1.) As their *owner*, acknowledging his propriety in them, and dominion over them: and so they are with him, as *his own*, made by his power, and created anew by his Spirit and grace. And under a sense of both, they refer themselves to his disposal, and lay themselves at his feet, saying, *Let him do to me as seemeth good to him*, 2 Sam. xv. 26. Though flesh and sense murmur and complain, quarrel and dispute, *Nevertheless*, I will say, *I am still with thee*.

(2.) As their *king and lawgiver*; and so they are with him as his *subjects*, regarding his will, as the rule appointing them their work, wherein they are to study to please and serve him, and so abide with him. He that made me, hath the fullest right to rule me; and he shall do so. O Lord, I am thy servant, I am thy servant; and whatever would tempt me to withdraw my allegiance, I dare not yield. Other lords have had dominion over me, and plead hard to re-

gain it ; but I delight to do thy will, O God : thy law is in my heart. By thee only will I make mention of thy name ; and though sorely assaulted, *Nevertheless I am continually with thee.*

(3.) As the *Searcher of hearts*, they are continually with him, as under his inspection, and open to it. *Psalms cxxxix. 1, 2, 3. O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.* Thou art witness to my inward grief through the workings of corruption, and in what manner I am urged by outward temptation : but however tempted, I would not yield : whatever I suffer for thee, or from thee, I would not allow myself to sin against thee, no not in thought. *Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,* verses 23, 24.

(4.) As the *God of all grace*, they are continually with him ; in a way of supplication, dependance and trust for what they need ; and in thanksgiving for what they receive. Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. *I am thine, save me.* If God do not save me, none else can. When he will work, none can hinder. And having so often experienced this, what reason have I to love, and bless, and cleave to him ? How strongly soever urged to neglect,

neglect, distrust, or revolt from thee, I can yet say, *Nevertheless I am continually with thee.* The freest of my desires and thoughts run out after thee ; my chief delight is in thee ; my largest expectations from thee ; communion with thee can turn all my sorrows into joy upon earth, and this perfected into sight, will make up heaven. In hope of this, and as breathing after it, however chastened, afflicted, tempted and tried, *Nevertheless I am continually with thee.*

This is a temper becoming the people of God ; and thus should they be with him at all times, and in every condition, particularly under the greatest tryals that befall them. Under these they should be with him.

1. By acknowledging his hand in determining their lot, how dark or afflictive soever it may be. Though the wicked flourish and the servants of God are oppressed, I must be far from thinking this happens by chance, or without wise ends. He that made the world has not cast off the government of it, nor is unconcerned how matters go in it. How bitter soever my cup may be, it is of his mixing, who does all things according to the counsel of his own will, and all things well. I would therefore look above and beyond second causes, to him whose kingdom ruleth over all, and receive evil as well as good from the hand of God : I would kiss the rod, as knowing who hath appointed it.

2. By *resolved adherence to him*, as their portion or chief good, however he see fit to deal with them. No trials shall separate between God and my soul. Afflictions shall not drive me from thee,

thee, O my God, but make me cleave the faster to thee. I should not love thee less, but more, when having little of the things of earth left to draw off my heart from Thee and heaven.

3. By *esteeming*, and improving an interest in his favour, as ballance enough against all the troubles of the world. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* Let them fret or repine, be ready to throw up their hope and die, who have no God to go to under their sufferings: But in the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts, O Lord, delight my soul.

4. They are with God, as the temples of his Spirit, enriched and adorned by his grace; and so such in whom he delights to dwell, 1 Cor. iii. 16. *Know ye not, saith the Apostle to Believers, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* By this Spirit they are inhabited now, as the guide of their way, preparing them for the glory with which they shall e'er long be filled. This Christ promises to his disciples, as matter of support, upon his going away. *John xiv. 16, 17. I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. The Lord hath chosen Zion: And what he speaks of the church in general, holds good as to every holy soul, he hath desired it for his habitation. And as entering into*
it

it declares, *This is my rest for ever : here will I dwell, for I have desired it,* Psal. cxxxii. 13, 14.

5. They are with him *as confederates and allies*, in whom he has a claim by covenant, and they in him. He remembers and records how it was made, and the helpless state he found them in, when he came to contract an alliance with them. *Ezek. xvi. 6. When I passed by thee and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live : Yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. Ver. 8. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold thy time was the time of love, and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness : Yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine.* The nature of the covenant is plainly declared, on their part and on his. *Isa. lv. 3. Incline your ear, and come unto me ; hear, &c. and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Jer. l. v. Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.* And this God is pleased to confirm upon their review of it, to every one that hath laid hold on it. *Psal. lxxxix. 28. My covenant shall stand fast with him.* And though transgression may awaken his rod : he adds, *Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.* And the believer, when ready to sink, has recourse to this for his support. *2 Sam. xxiii. 5. Although my house be not so with God ; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and*

and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.

6. They are with him, as his peculiar favourites now, and as heirs of the kingdom which he hath prepared for them that love him hereafter. They are his favourites now, though they are apt to think otherwise, when walking in the dark, or under his rebukes. In that case, Zion, and this and the other of her children may be ready to say, *the Lord hath forsaken me, My God hath forgotten me*: But he argues down the complaint, *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.* They are in heaviness; but it is when need is; not for want of love, but from it. *Heb. xii. 6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.* No affliction is for the present joyous but grievous. And when it lies sore and long, it is no uncommon thing for a holy soul to let fall such complaints as these: *Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies,* *Psal. lxxxvii. 7.* But they have been brought to own at last, that this was their infirmity, and that it was *in their haste* that any of them said, *I am cut off from before thine eyes,* *Psal. xxxi. 22.* God speaks in another strain, I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Whatever his people suffer from, or for him. The Apostle speaks in their name what it becomes them to speak,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us; adding both for himself and them, I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

By how many expressions doth God intimate the nearness of his people to him, even when they are ready to doubt or question it, or conclude the contrary? *In all their afflictions he is afflicted: He that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye: Whilst he speaks against them, he earnestly remembers them still: His bowels are troubled for them: They are engraven on his hands, and are near his heart, and have a place in it: He hears their groans, beholds their tears, regards their sighs, and will e'er long shew it. He hath formed them for his praise, observes their concern for his honour, and is pleased with it. He hath set his mark upon them, as those he owns, and loves, and values now; and faith of them, They shall be mine, in that day when I make up my jewels, Mal. iii. 17.*

Thus they are with him, as interested in his favour, even that which he bears unto his own: and not only so, but as heirs of his kingdom. To this they are chosen, ordained, called and entitled: 'This they are in some measure already made meet for, and bid to expect it. *Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to*
give

give you the kingdom. Their Lord and head is already there, and has sent them down the earnest, pledge, and beginning of it, to assure them of their being at last with him. Though it doth not yet appear what they shall be; being now the children of God, they are heirs too, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. How little soever they have in hand, God is not ashamed to be called *their God*; having in the better world, abundantly provided for them, and now is keeping them by him, as such who in the fittest season, he will call up to the possession of all things.

In these respects the people of God *are with him, as a privilege.*

2. This belongs to every one of the number, and at all times.

Though cast down, they are not cast off, nor ever shall. After the *Psalmist* had been shaken and staggered, and almost gone; after he was sensible of a great deal of weakness and imperfection, and had too sadly discovered it (which he reflects upon with shame and sorrow) yet he adds with adoring thankfulness, as the ground of his support, *Nevertheless I am continually with thee.* And the same sense of heart belongs to every faint. As,

1. They are chosen by the same eternal love, which fetched its motives from itself, in pitching upon any; and with the same freedom marked out all that are here recovered by grace, in order to be carried up, in the appointed season, to glory. Whatever difference there is among believers in other respects, there happiness springs from the same fountain; and they have this as a common ground of thanksgiving to God, every one of them
for

for themselves, viz. *That from the beginning he hath chosen them to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth.*

As, 2. They are all bought with the same price: *Not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish, and without spot, 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.* And as ransomed by him, and believing in him, they are entitled to the same glorious privileges, the fruits of his blood, of which being and abiding with God, is one Christ tells us he laid down his life for the sheep, *John x. 15.* for all of them, the least as well as the greatest; the poor as well as the rich; in whatever age or place they should be born, or wherever their lot should be cast. *Christ loved his Church, and gave himself for it, Eph. v. 25.* Which the Apostle applies to himself, *Gal. ii. 20. Who loved me, and gave himself for me:* Which may go round to every member of his mystical body, and with equal truth be assumed by every sincere, though weak believer; all having but one common Saviour, *Who suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God:* to a state of safety, in abiding with God here, and of perfect blessedness, in seeing him above. All were once afar off, and as many as are made nigh, are so by the blood of Jesus, as ransomed by him, and related to him. and the meanest of this number, has no reason to sink; being he is accepted of God, in the beloved, and for his sake *continually with him.*

As, 3. The people of God have all undergone the same *change*, and so by regeneration and adoption, are related to God as children. *Of his own*
 2 *will,*

will, saith the Apostle, begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures, James i. 18. And to as many as receive an offered saviour, to them Power is given to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name : Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, John i. 12, 13. Christ is the Head of the family that is called out of the rest of the world, and appropriated to God. They are created anew in him, and for his sake admitted to the privileges of sons and daughters, by his father and theirs. And as it is upon this ground that any can be said to have God present with him, as a father with a child ; so it is the common privilege of the whole household of faith : and from the highest to the lowest, all should join in the admiration, Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ; and that as one of the number, I should be continually with him : But even so, O Father, it seemeth good in thy sight.

As, 4. They are all inhabited by the same Spirit. It was not to the Apostles alone, to whom the comfortable promise was made by our blessed Lord, a little before his departure ; but to all his sincere followers, as distinguished from the rest of the world. *John. xiv. 16. I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him : but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. Where this Spirit hath made his entry into any soul,*

soul, savingly renewing and bringing it back to God, he there keeps possession for him, to carry on by his stay, the grace he first implanted. And as the temples of that Spirit, we are said to dwell in God, and he in us, 1 John iii. 24. And though it be not equally clear to all, thus every saint may be said to be with him.

As, 5. Their covenant relation to God is personal and particular, God is with every one of his people. When ready to sink, a child of God may read God's own words with application. *Ezek. xvi. 3. I entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine.*

As, 6. They have all an interest in God's special love, that which he bears to none in the world besides them; and as they are all heirs, one as well as another, to the kingdom he hath prepared above. We read of a favour which God beareth to his people; with which the Psalmist prays to be remembered. *Pf. cvi. 4. and into which every one of that number is taken. Pf. v. 12. For thou, O Lord, wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.* They are all interested in Christ, the first and great beloved, in whom the Father is always well-pleased. And being justified by faith, have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord: by whom also they have access by faith into that grace wherein they stand, *Rom. v. 1, 2.* And upon the same ground, they are all entitled to the same heaven, and shall all at length meet there. The Apostle puts the question as to such as were apt to be dejected in themselves, and despised by others. *1 Jam. ii. 5. Hearken my beloved brethren,*

hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

Such as love God and are beloved of him, his children of what stature soever, are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ: And whatever be their condition at present, as tending to a far better world, they are all graciously with God, and God with them. They are so at all times, or *continually*.

Here indeed the groans of saints lead us to distinguish between the *Privilege itself*, and the *Sense of it*. Many may be, and are still with God, though they could never say this; or it may be have lost the *evidence* and *comfort* of it which once they had. In the other world none can be with God, but they must know it too; and knowing, they shall be always filled with unutterable joy. But alas, how often is it otherwise in this state with them? How earnestly doth holy Job breathe forth his desires after God, as withdrawn? Job xxiii. 3. *O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!* And again, Ver. 8, 9. *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left-hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: He hideth himself on the right-hand, that I cannot see him.* And he, upon this account, makes that affecting cry, Chap. xxix. 2. *O that I were as in months past, when his candle shined upon my head, and when the Almighty was yet with me.* But now he laments it, as far otherwise with him. He had lost the comfortable sense of God's presence, which once he had.

Our

Our blessed Lord himself was sensible of his want of this, which put him upon making that deep complaint, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* And if this was done to the green tree, well may it be done to the dry: If our Lord and Head suffered, for a time, the hidings of his Father's face, it is no wonder that his followers are tried in the same manner, and sometimes left to walk in darkness.

And not only, in appearance or to their own apprehension, but in reality, the gracious influences of the Spirit, may, to a great degree, be withdrawn; for which there may be wise and just reasons. And in this case, how often do his people complain, that they are forsaken, forgotten, cast off for ever? But whatever conclusions of this kind they are apt to make, God never so departs, but that *he is still with them*. His relation to them is never dissolved, nor his loving-kindness withdrawn. He will not retract his purpose, nor withdraw his grace whereby they are set apart for himself: Their union to Christ shall never be broken off, nor they cease to be his members: They shall not be cast out of his family, nor finally forsaken of his Spirit, after all that he hath done in them as his living temples; His covenant shall stand fast with them, and nothing shall be able to separate them from his love, or keep them out of his kingdom. With respect to all this, it is the privilege of every child of God, however dealt with, not to be alone, but to have their heavenly Father with them now, as well as heretofore; at all times, in every place, and in all conditions and circumstances of life: In prospe-

city, and in affliction ; when lifted up, and when cast down ; in health, and sickness ; in life, and in death ; in this world, and in the next. Whatever *changes* any of them have to go through : *Nevertheless*, every one of them in particular may say, *I am continually with thee*. But this leads us to consider the third thing.

3. The happiness of the saints in being with God continually.

To be with God, is the sum of heaven ; and even while we are here, it includes as much of it, as is suitable to our present state.

In their being with God, his people are with one of infinite perfections, and all made over by covenant, and engaged and imployed by love for them.

What can they want, who are with God, whose all-sufficiency is open for their supply ? What can they fear, when being with him, who hath Almighty power to protect ? What duties can be too difficult to discharge, that he calls them to ? Under what burdens need they sink, having his Spirit and grace to assist, support, sweeten and sanctify them ? In what place need they be sad or solitary, while they live, and how willing may they be to die, that they may be with him for ever ? *Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.* The Lord God is a sun and a shield : the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from those that walk

walk uprightly. And this is the God *I am always continually with.*

A God who is a sun to shine upon my path, and be the fountain of all blessings to me; and a shield to protect me in them: He will give the grace that is most to be desired in this world; and that glory which I am breathing after, in another; and withhold nothing that is good for me by the way.

Though afflicted, I am with one who pities me: though in temptation, *as the God of peace*, he will bruise satan under my feet, and do it shortly. Through all the difficulties of life, he will be my guide. And in the view and approach of death, when flesh and heart shall fail, God will be the strength of my heart, and afterward my portion for ever. Happy is the people that is in such a case; happy indeed, whose God is the Lord. May every one of you now in his presence, be of the happy number: and then in the multitude of your thoughts within you, may his comforts delight your souls.

4. To what is this happiness owing. The happiness of the people of God, *in being continually with him*, is owing to his keeping his hold of them. This is acknowledged by the *Psalmist* here: *Thou hast holden me by my right-hand.* Having obtained help of God, we continue with him.

And the necessity of this help from God may be inferred,

1. From the weakness of grace in his saints, while they are on earth.

2. Upon the account of sin and corruption,

which dwelleth in them, and which they cannot quite be freed from, while on earth.

3. From the unwearied diligence of satan, who as a roaring lion, continually goeth about seeking whom he may devour : So that it is by the mighty power of God, that any are kept through faith unto salvation.

But that the people of God are, and shall be upheld by him, this is sure,

As the love of God is unchangeable. *Is. liv. 10. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed, but my kindness shall not depart, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.*

The covenant made with them, is everlasting. Hence sincere believers are accepted of God, and continued with him, notwithstanding lamented failings, which for the sake of the Mediator, God is ready to pardon.

The intercession of Christ is continued, and prevailing. And believers abiding with God on earth, is the result of his pleading in heaven.

God is always mindful of his promise, and faithful to it, wherein he hath said, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee, Heb. xiii. 3.*

APPLICATION.

1. Is it the temper and duty of a gracious soul to be still with God? Such may hence learn, what to think of their state, whose character is the reverse to this: who instead of being continually with God, are utter strangers to him, and live without him; are still with sin contriving it, or committing it; still with the world thinking of it, and delighting in it. O that they whose consciences tell them, this is their case, would lay it

to heart ; estrangement from God being contrary to the ends of creation and redemption, and if continued in, will issue in an eternal separation from him.

2. Are gracious souls, when acting like themselves, *continually with God*? How much do they forget their character, who would be accounted such, and yet are seldom with him, if ever?

Cannot some of you remember the time when your meditation of God was sweet, your desires after him ardent, your applications to him frequent? Is it so still : or is it far otherwise? How unreasonable is the change? Is not God the same? Should he not be the same to you? How much have you suffered by that estrangement? *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent,* Rev. ii. 5.

3. How desireable is the condition of a gracious soul, who is continually with God? How safe, how comfortable, how happy?

S E R M O N V.

P S A L M XCVII. II.

Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in Heart.

IN these words we have a cordial sent from heaven, for the relief of those that are mourning in their way thither.

A seed-time is here supposed, which how sorrowful soever, shall be followed with a joyful harvest: *Light is sown for the Righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.* With reference to which words four things are obvious to consideration.

I. What is *sown*, viz. *Light and Gladness.*

II. For whom.

III. Where.

IV. The season for reaping.

And when we have spoken to these, way will be open to the application.

I. What is said *to be sown*, is *light* and *gladness*, that is, light or gladness; both words denoting the same thing. As darkness and trouble, so light and gladness are used in scripture as terms equivalent: And *they shall look unto the*

the earth; and behold, trouble and darkness, Isa. viii. 22.

Trouble, like darkness, is disconsolate and frightful; but gladness is fitly represented by light. Unto the upright, there ariseth light in darkness, i. e. comfort in their affliction and distress, Ps. cxii. 4.

Thus the Jews in Esther's time, being delivered from impending destruction, had light, and gladness, and joy.

This light and gladness, is said to be sown, i. e. to be prepared, reserved and safely laid up, as seed-corn committed with care and caution to the prepared earth, in order to an after-harvest.

The figurative term, taken from sowing seed, plainly imports,

1. That the joy designed for the righteous, is, as to the fulness of it, yet future: as reaping is not immediately to follow sowing, nor the harvest to be expected, as soon as the corn is cast into the ground, but to be patiently waited for.

2. That how little soever of this appears at present; nay, though it seems to be buried, like corn under the clods, it shall spring forth, grow up, and ripen to a blessed harvest. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, which he commits to the ground with great concern about the event, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. Thus they that sow in tears, shall reap with joy, Psalm cxxvi. 5. Light and gladness have a pleasing sound, in which every one is desirous to share.

share. The seed is precious, and the fruit or product shall be answerable. Light is sown, that shall rise up to glory; gladness, that shall issue in fulness of joy.

The blessing intended under either term, carries with it its own commendation. Its excellency is above the need or help of words to set it off: as who would go about to paint a sun-beam, or can attempt it, without taking off from its lustre? *Light*, what more beautiful? *Gladness*, what more desirable? Who would not reach the felicity these are chosen to denote? But they are to be prepared for it, who would be made happy in the possession of the seed sown, and be made regular expectants of the blissful harvest.

As therefore light is sown, and gladness laid up: I go on to consider,

II. For whom they are laid up.

And here the character of the persons is two-fold,

1. The *righteous*. And,

2. The *upright in heart*.

1. They for whom light is sown, are *the righteous*.

Upon the mention of this, that passage of the Apostle is apt to meet us, where he says, *It is written, There is none righteous, no not one*, Rom. iii. 10. And so it may be asked, To what purpose, is light sown for persons not to be found? For clearing our way, let it be remembered, That all men are now in a fallen state. God made the first man *after his own image*, in integrity or righteousness, which was his honour:

nour : but he did not long retain it, or abide in the state wherein he was made. The law that was given him to keep, he soon broke, and so lost his innocence ; and instead of it, being himself sinful, devolved guilt and pollution upon all his offspring. Hereupon there is none righteous, so as to be innocent or sinless, no not one. All are conceived and born in iniquity, and so are sinners by nature, transgressors from the womb. And as to practice, *There is not a just man upon earth that doth good, and sinneth not.* Nevertheless, every believer may be said to be righteous, as found in Christ, and conformed to him.

(1.) *As found in Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.* This is a doctrine that could only be known by revelation ; and there it is set in the clearest light. When the first *Adam* had sinned, and involved his posterity in guilt and death, it pleased God to set up his Son, as a second *Adam* ; *that as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation ; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life, Rom. v. 18.*

This is the contrivance of wisdom and grace, worthy of God, and only proper to him, *That as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners : so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous, Rom. v. 18, 19.* They that believe, are of God, in and through Christ ; and have him made unto them of God, *that righteousness* in which they may stand before God ; the great thing which the guilty need. Such an High Priest became us, who was holy, harmless,

less, undefiled and separate from sinners; who; yet God *made to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,* 2 Cor. v. 21.

Moreover,

(2.) Believers are righteous, *as conformed to Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.* All of this number are renewed in the spirit of their mind, and so have put off the old man, and put on the new, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, *Eph. iv. 24.* In them the power of sin is broken, though they are not entirely free from all its remains; and being united to Christ, and led by his Spirit, they endeavour to walk, as he also walked. And thus, *He that doth righteousness, is righteous,* 1 John iii. 7.

2. They are also stiled, *the upright in heart.*

This is the same with *being righteous*: those who are renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God, and that have a principle of grace within, are enabled to walk in holiness and righteousness before him. Uprightness of life is not excluded; but such as God has set apart for himself, may be spoken of, *as upright in heart,* And for these ends,

(1.) To denote that the heart comes under God's all-seeing eye: for all things are naked and open to him, with whom we have to do. This he declares, *Jer. xvii. 10. I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways.*

(2.) That every man is in God's account, as his heart is. They only are reckoned upright by

by him, who are so at the heart, *Romans ii.*
28.

(3.) That uprightness of life must have its root in an upright heart, and spring from thence. *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good:* and the tree is to be made good, before the fruit can be so. The children of God by faith in Christ, have both parts of the character belonging to them: they are righteous and upright in heart too; and as such, *light and gladness* are sown for them, that is,

1. For them and none else. The righteous are heirs of God's greatest benefits. All things are theirs, who have Christ for theirs: but they that are without Christ, are without hope. They have no title to the privileges of his members, nor meetness for them. The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: but the ungodly, whatever disguise they may put on for a time, shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous: *For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish,* Psalm i. 6. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart: but there is no peace, saith God, to the wicked. They may justify themselves before men, but God searcheth the heart.

2. *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart,* i. e. for all of this number and character. The eyes of the Lord are upon them, from the greatest down to the least. Light is sown for the righteous; of which number all believers are: and gladness
for

for the upright in heart, *i. e.* for such as are *Israelites indeed*; whether at present *strong* or *weak*; more grown, or as yet but babes in Christ. Being in Christ, in truth, light and gladness is shewn for them, which leads us to shew,

III. *Where* it is sown.

The answer to this will come under the following heads, *viz.* In the purpose of God, In the purchase of Christ, In the office of the Spirit, In the promises of the Word, In the work of Grace wrought in the heart, and in the preparations made above in glory.

1. *Light is sown for the righteous* in the purpose of God, which he himself is pleased to open, *Jer. xxix. 11. I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.* God is willing that the heirs of promise should have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them, *Heb. vi. 18.*

2. In the purchase of Christ, that which he made by dying, and continues to plead, as risen again. He was exceeding sorrowful even unto death, to make way for his disciples peace and joy. And what he obtained at so dear a rate, he again and again assures them of it. *Peace I leave with you: in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

3. In the office of the Spirit, and the errand on which he was sent by Christ. This was to be the constant comforter of his disciples. And

to

to make way for his coming for this end, Christ tells them, that it was expedient for them that he should go away, else the Comforter would not come; but if he went away, he would assuredly send him. And he has faithfully done it, *John xvi. 7.*

4. In the promises of the Word: particularly,

(1.) In such as relate to the light of God's countenance. *Matth. v. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God:* see him not only above, but here below, to the begetting that joy in them, which a stranger intermeddleth not with. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, Ps. xxv. 14.*

(2.) In such as relate to the protection of his power. *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty, Ps. xci. 1. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved, Ps. lv. 22.* This was the powerful argument God used with *Abraham*, and it is recorded for the encouragement of all the faithful. *Gen. xvii. 1. I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect.* Do this, and if Omnipotence can defend thee, thou shalt be safe: if infinite goodness can satisfy thee, thou shalt be happy. *Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward, Gen. xv. 1.* Upon this ground, the *Psalmist* concludes for himself and all others of the household of faith, *My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart, Psal. vii. 10. He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; for he walks with God, Prov. x. 9. He shall dwell*

on high : his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks, &c. *Isa. xxxiii. 15, 16.*

(3.) In such as relate to his presence and support under trouble and affliction. *Isaiah xli. 10. Fear thou not, for I am with thee : be not dismayed ; for I am thy God : I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby, Heb. xii. 11. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c. who comforteth us in all our tribulation, &c. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ, 2 Cor. i. 4, 5.*

(4.) In such promises as relate to deliverance from the evils they feel, or fear. *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, 2 Pet. ii. 9. And he hath graciously promised it. Psalm xci. 15. I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him. Thus affectionately he bespeaks his faithful servants in the time of distress. Isa. xxvi. 20. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy door about thee : hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.*

(5.) In such as relate to their inward peace, to counterballance their outward afflictions and trials. *Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness, Psalm cxii. 4. The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in him ; and all the*

the upright in heart shall glory. See John xvi. 33, &c.

(6.) In such as relate to the special conduct of providence directing their steps. *Psalms xxv.*

11. *What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way he shall choose. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous,* Prov. ii.

7, 8. *and preserveth the way of his saints. He declareth, I will teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye,* Psalm

xxxii. 8. *We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God,* Rom. viii. 28.

This God is their God for ever and ever: He will be their guide even unto death, *Psalms xlii.*

14.

(7.) In such as relate to free access to the throne of grace, and acceptance through Christ for their persons and duties. *The sacrifice of the*

wicked is an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is his delight, Prov. xv. 8.

He is well pleased with their approaches to him, and their sincere desires and endeavours to please him; their spots are covered, and their defects are supplied, and themselves accepted in the Beloved; in whom God is become a Father of mercies to them, and deals with them as such.

(8.) In such as relate to spiritual advantages by publick ordinances. *Prov. x. 29. The way of the Lord is strength to the upright. And they that wait upon him shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint,* Isa. xl. 31.

(9). After a life spent in the service of God, they have a promise of peace and hope in their death, and of heaven beyond it. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace*, Psalm xxxvii. 37. *The righteous hath hope in his death*, Prov. xiv. 32. *He shall enter into peace, &c. each one walking in his uprightness. The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Sion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads, &c. and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

5. *Light is sown for the righteous*, in the work of grace wrought in their hearts. Sanctification is one ground of consolation. *The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever*, Isa. xxxii. 17.

Four things speak the work of grace in the heart to be a ground of joy.

1. Its being the result of eternal love.
2. Its being never to be undone, destroyed, or taken away, after it is wrought; but to be carried on to its perfection.
3. Its being accompanied with pardon of sin and justification.
4. Its being the pledge and earnest of future glory, *Whom he justified, them he also glorified*, Rom. viii. 30.
6. Lastly, *Light is sown for the righteous* in the preparations made above. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

This

This Christ leaves with his disciples, as a powerful cordial at his going away. *In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and take you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* Thus we have seen where light is sown.

IV. The last enquiry is, When is the season of reaping?

And to this, the answer is, The season of reaping the first-fruits, of reaping in part, is at some times in the present life; the season of reaping more fully, is at death; and of reaping most fully and perfectly commenceth at the day of judgment, and is continued throughout eternity.

1. The season of reaping *in part*, falls out at some times *within the course of this present life*. Particularly,

(1.) Times of affliction have been to the upright, seasons of reaping *the joy sown*. By this they have been prepared for sufferings, supported under them, and made afterwards to forget their sorrows, by reason of the gladness breaking in from the affecting discovery of what God has done for them, and wrought in them. Thus God causeth light to arise in darkness, and in a rainy day refresheth them with a beam from heaven, brightening the drops that fall: brings his people into the wilderness, and there speaks comfortably unto them.

(2.) Seasons of suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel, have been seasons wherein the

upright have *begun to reap* the joy sown. When called *to resist unto blood, striving against sin*, they have need of more than ordinary comfort, to enable them to meet, and hold firm thro' the fiery trial : and they have found that then encouragement hath been yielded them in a degree they never before experienced, *John xvi. 33. In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

To this the *apostles* could witness, *2 Cor. i. 5. As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.* When Stephen was stoning, he saw the heavens opened, and the Glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. When called to the greatest sufferings, or in the extremity of them, the comforting Spirit has come in, giving the saints that view, of what grace had done for them, and of the great things thereupon promised to them, which has in a good measure scattered their doubts, and carried them above their fears. Thus the bitter cup is sweetened, and as being that which their Father gives them to drink, they are prepared with a steady hand to drink it up.

(3.) Seasons wherein God has called the righteous to great and difficult service, have been *seasons of reaping the beginnings of joy sown.* When their heavenly Father has lifted up the light of his countenance upon them, and shed abroad the sense of his love within them, they are prepared to go whither he sends them, and to do whatever he bids them.

(4.) After

(4.) After fore conflicts with Satan, the upright have been revived by the *springing of the joy sown*. After Christ was tempted, came an angel to comfort him. And for the encouragement of his followers, he declares, *Rev. ii. 17. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.* The like after a time of desertion, God gives his people: beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for the spirit of heaviness; enabling them who were ready to conclude themselves forgotten, to read his own words with application, and so with the joy of faith. *Isa. liv. 7, 8. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer.*

(5.) In waiting upon God in the sanctuary, the upright have met with him, and so have had the *beginnings of joy sown*.

In prayer the holy Man is sometimes wrapped up to heaven, and satisfied as to the happiness that awaits him there. The glory of the upper world is shewn to his faith, with the ground on which he may hope for a part in it: so that in in this respect he hath had the promise made good to him, *Isaiab xxxiii. 17. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.*

In reading, or hearing the word, a beam has been often darted in, enlightening the mind, and warming and cheering the heart. But especially the table of the Lord has been frequently made *the Gate of heaven*. Indeed the great end of the Lord's supper, next to the shewing forth Christ's death, is to promote the believer's growth in grace, and that he may attain the evidence of it to his greater consolation and joy. Here therefore, the drooping have been raised, the weak and trembling encouraged, the bruised reed strengthened, and the smoking flax made to burn, the hungry fed with the bread of God, and the thirsty satisfied with the water of life. Thus even in the present state, there are seasons of reaping *the joy sown*.

2. *A fuller reaping time will be at death:* With some, as the soul is going; but with all, immediately after its release from the body.

As going, the soul is sometimes satisfied as to its special relation to God, and has a lively hope, for the sake of Christ, of being accepted with him. The divine life has been most vigorous, when the natural one has been about to expire; and the soul raised in the exercise of grace, when going to take its flight to glory. Standing upon the ridge of life, they have had a *Pisgah* sight of the promised land; and having their evidences clear, have had a sweet serenity and peace spreading itself all over the soul; so that with a smiling countenance they have taken their leave of this world, and bid the ministering angels do their office in bearing them up to their blessed abode.

But

But this, it must be owned, is not the case of all God's children. Some set in a cloud; others with Christ in their arms, and heaven in their view; and when all are weeping round them, sing with good old Simeon, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*

3. The season in which the righteous shall reap their joy sown, *to the full*, and in perfection, shall be at the last day. Then Christ shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe; and lead them all in a body, and all of them perfected, into that presence of God, where there is *fulness of joy*, and where there are *pleasures for evermore*.

Thus we are to say to the righteous, it shall be well with them, everlastingly well; as it is their Father's good pleasure to give them a kingdom. The upright in heart are born from heaven, and designed for it. Where God gives grace, he will give glory, and such as fadeth not away.

APPLICATION.

1. Is light sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart? 'Tis hence plain, that in making out our evidences for heaven, we are to begin *within*: to see to it that a new heart be given, a heart formed after God's heart, and this proved by a life of devotedness to him; without which there can be no well grounded hope of being admitted to dwell with him.

2. Is light sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart? It need not seem strange, that darkness and distress may be for a while their lot. The light sown may not presently spring up; the gladness designed may be hid; and hence the happy heirs of it may be covered with darkness, and walk in it: but in that case, they are not to despond, as if the disconsolate night would never have an end; but, on the the contrary, ought to beg grace to follow the direction given them from heaven, namely, to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God, *Isaiab l. 10.* That God, who has said, *That none of them that trust in him, shall be desolate,* Psalm xxxiv. 22.

3. Is light sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart? This tells them at once their need of patience, and what abundant reason they have for it.

Their need of patience is obvious; as there must be a space between seed-time and harvest. The light sown will assuredly spring up, and at last ripen into that fulness of joy, which will make amends for the longest stay, and for whatever storms or blasts may intervene. As in the natural world, so in the world of grace, God hath resolved, *that while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest shall not cease,* Genesis viii. 22. With reference to this, remember the Apostle's exhortation, *James v. 7, 8. Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and bath*

I

bath

hath long patience for it. It is something more glorious that you have in view, than the common husbandman hath: Wherefore be ye also patient, stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

4. Is light sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart? how certain is it that God's thoughts towards such are thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give them a desired end, *Jer. xxix. 11.* And how difficult soever it may be for a time, to reconcile his conduct in his providence with what in his word he has bid them expect, the end will prove to his glory, and their eternal joy, and shew that he has done all things well.

5. Is light sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart? Let none conclude, they are none of the number, because wanting present comfort: Their heavenly Father may see good to withhold this from his children for a while in their waiting state, as theirs is while they are in this world. Alas! cries the trembling christian, I have waited long, and taken some pains to know my case, how matters stand between God and my soul; but still I am full of doubts and fears, having not light enough to discern, whether I am in the number of those for whom light is sown.

To such let me offer a few things that may be of use to them to hold their thoughts to.

1. Though you cannot say with that evidence you could wish, that you are in the number of the upright in heart, for whom light is sown; yet your doubts do not prove you are not. Your
state

state may be safe, notwithstanding your fears of the contrary : Grace in the heart, and in the evidence of it, do not always go together. Indeed the same Spirit that works grace, is to witness it too : But herein the Spirit of God is a free agent, and may do this when, and in whom, and to what degree he pleaseth. Assurance is not the privilege of all God's children, but of such ordinarily as are more grown, whilst others are held in a waiting posture, under the command to make their calling and election sure, as most suitable to the Divine Majesty, and the purposes he has to serve by his children of different stature and strength in the household of faith.

2. Under all your complaints of darkness and doubts, what is the testimony of conscience as to your temper and carriage ? Is there no sin but what you mourn under, watch and pray and strive against, and are resolved always to do so ? Though you cannot say that you stand in a special relation to God as such as are of his peculiar people, are you at the same time, careful to please him, and afraid to offend him ? Do you cry after him, pray to him, wait upon him, desiring nothing more than to love, and be beloved by him, esteeming his loving-kindness better than life ? Whence is it, but from grace within, that his favour is above all things desired and sought ?

And under this head, let me ask, What is the meaning of your endeavours to bring matters to an issue, by looking into the world, and into your hearts, and then up to heaven with the earnest cry, *Search me, O God, and see if there be any wicked*

wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting? Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.

3. Distinguish between supporting hope, and the grounds of it, between faith, and joy and triumph arising from assurance. The former may be in such as have not reached the latter. Must you not own, that you have been made sensible of the evil of sin, and of your liableness to the wrath to come, and that there was no way of escape but by the mercy of God in Jesus Christ? In this case has not Christ been set before you, as the only all-sufficient Saviour? And upon the invitation given to the weary and heavy laden to come to him, and the encouraging promise that he that cometh he will in no wise cast out, Have you not accepted him for yours, and as far as you know your own hearts, resigned yourselves to him, as his? Though you are not without your fears as to your sincerity herein, are there not grounds of hope, that your principles, aims and ends are right, and that your state is not the same as formerly?

For instance :

Is it not your desire and endeavour to have the same mind in you that was also in Christ, and to walk as he also walked? Would you not fain love God more, and serve him better? Is it not your grief and burden that you are no more like him, and that you so often offend him? Do ye not lament and bewail the deadness and disaffection of your spirits to him, and account them the happiest people in the world who love and are beloved of him, and live in the sense of his love, and had rather be of that number, than as

to outward prosperity be the greatest or most considerable upon earth? If you can say this, light and gladness is sown for you. And hereupon,

6. Wait for the springing up of this in God's time and way, and beware of prescribing to him. It is enough that he waiteth to be gracious, and will be exalted in shewing mercy.

7. Let such as in the present state have, in any good degree, reaped the light and gladness sown, return the glory to heaven for this distinguishing grace; and endeavour to comfort others with the consolation wherewith they themselves are comforted of God.

8. *Lastly*, How blessed a change will the mourning believer make by dying, for whom light is sown! though little of it was found upon earth, yet upon his removal from thence, he enters upon the full harvest in heaven. O the transport to go mourning to the gates of *Zion*; and there, at once, to have all tears dried up, and his head crowned with everlasting joy!

S E R M O N VI.

PSALM CXVI. 7.

*Return unto thy Rest, O my Soul, for the
Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

THESE words were uttered by the *Psalmist* after some heavy afflictions he had met with, but by the goodness of God was now delivered from. After a dark and gloomy night, a cheerful morning opened upon him, and he had a quiet harbour in view, which he bespake his soul to put into: *Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Observe here,

- I. Something this good man would cast his soul off from, which is implied in the term here used, *Return*.
- II. Something he would call it to, and this is its *Rest*, its proper and peculiar rest.

This *Rest* is not to be understood to denote a quiet, sedate, or even a cheerful temper, which the *Psalmist* called his soul to, now when he saw himself to be in Safety, after he had been tempestuously tossed and ruffled with his late afflictions: But as the rest of a saint is something
more

more excellent than that of a natural man, it may be justly taken to point to the rich fountain of the saints rest, *viz.* God himself; and to him in opposition to the whole creation, in which rest could not be found.

And so it is as if the *Psalmist* had said, “ This
 “ world is not the place I was made for, nor
 “ am I ever to expect satisfaction in it : though
 “ I am necessarily employed about its affairs, it
 “ is what I cannot take my portion in. I am a
 “ stranger here, and it is no wonder if I am treated
 “ as such. I have been long wandering in it, as
 “ in a foreign and barren land : ” Wherefore,
return unto thy rest, O my soul, to thy rest in God.
 He is *thy rest*, the rest of souls, the only proper
 and peculiar one, and thine by a claim that shall
 not leave thee ashamed, *Return unto thy rest, O*
my soul.

III. We have the argument added to urge this,
viz. the consideration and experience of God’s
 goodness in his dispensations towards him ; *for*
the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.

As the words refer to some foregoing trouble
 that disturbed his soul, we may note,

1. That saints have their trials under which
 the best of them, whilst they are in the body,
 are liable to be discomposed and put out of
 frame.

2. That whatever God’s people suffer, they
 have still reason to think and speak well of him,
 as one who has dealt bountifully with them.

3. That the experience of this should be an
 argument with them to endeavour to repress irre-
 gular

gular workings with them, and calm and compose their souls to rest.

I shall not distinctly handle all these, but sum up what I design in this one doctrinal *Proposition*, viz.

That gracious souls have their rest in God, to which upon all occasions they should call upon themselves to return; and encourage themselves to it, by the consideration of his abounding goodness towards them.

This the *Psalmist* here does, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Here I shall shew,

- I. That gracious souls have their rest in God.
- II. What rest they have in him.
- III. What is meant by the term by which the *Psalmist* calls his soul to it, *Return*.
- IV. When, or upon what occasions a child of God should thus call upon his soul.
- V. How the consideration of God's bounty dealing with them, and in what instances, should engage them hereunto.

Lastly, The use of the whole.

I. I shall shew that gracious souls have their rest in God. This I shall endeavour to open in a few particulars.

I. Gracious souls are provided of a rest. The soul is the better part, and *this*, the people of God, as being made wise from above, know how to value, and are most concerned about. Whilst the generality of the world are solicitous for the body, how that may be fed and cloathed, protected and preserved, gratified and pleased, a believer's

liever's chief care is for the spiritual inhabitant, his immortal soul, and cannot sit down satisfied and easy, and say, all is well with him, when he is abundantly provided of earthly Goods, respecting the body and suiting the senses : That, and that only deserves the name of rest, which can give rest to the soul. How empty and insignificant must be that rest (cries such an one) that is only common to me with brutes, and in which the soul considered either as *spiritual* or as *holy*, has none or very little share ? The wants of the soul to a saint are the greatest wants ; and the rest of the soul, the most desirable rest.

If the soul is at rest and safe, provided for as to another world, and at ease in the expectation of it, the body shall partake of its happiness in the end ; and its temporal sufferings will signify little by the way. The rest of the soul is ballance enough against the afflictions of the outward man : But whatever rest the body may enjoy for a time, in present sensual good, it is far from being well with the *man*, whilst the better part is neglected, and hath no foundation for true rest in this world, and stands upon the brink of eternal torments in another, in which the body must also share with it. The rest and happiness of the soul, is therefore of the highest importance ; both in itself, and in the saint's account. The saint will be thankful for outward accommodations respecting the body ; but tastes far greater sweetness in the promise, *that his soul shall dwell in ease*, Psal. xxv. 13.

Gracious souls have their proper rest, which they are most taken up about and concerned for.

2. They

2. They have this their rest in God: In God *truly*, and in God *only*.

(1.) They have a rest in God *truly*. It is not a name only, but a reality, though it is better felt than described. Whatever tranquility and peace, content and pleasure, satisfaction and joy go to make up the rest of a soul, which others seek in vain in the creatures, these the saint hath in God. The *Psalmist* here speaks of it as one that knew what it meant, as one who was experimentally acquainted with it. There is a rest for souls, a rest in God, which how empty a notion it may seem to be to others, the real christian knows to be a truth, and something which he would not part withal, for all other pleasures in the world.

(2.) Holy souls rest in God *only*. Nothing below him can satisfy their desires; and beyond him, and besides him they can neither desire, nor want any thing more. They look upon all this world, and seeing and fore-seeing its vanity, they deprecate their having of their portion in it, and being put off with it. *O Lord, deliver me from the men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure, &c.* O let me be none of the number who have this to be their *all*, and who can be satisfied with it: my business, O Lord, lies with thee, and my happiness in thee. *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness,* Psalm xvii. 14.

By this a saint is distinguished from all others, his taking up his rest only in God, *Pf. iv. 6, 7. There be many that say, Who will shew*

us any good? But any good will not satisfy such as God has set apart for himself: It is therefore added, as that which they most desire, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.* And the granting of such a request, gives them the greatest joy: *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.* And in taking the rest here found for the gracious soul, it follows, *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou Lord only, makest me dwell in safety.* We have an appeal of such a soul to God himself, as quitting the whole creation, and centering in him, as better than all. *Psalms. lxxiii. 25. Whom have I in heaven, but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

(3.) Gracious souls rest in God, *i. e.* They and none else, They and all of their number.

(1.) They and none else. Whatever others may speak of a rest in God, only holy souls know what it means. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul,* to thy rest in calm and cheerful submission to God's will, delight in his service, satisfaction in his presence, in joy in communion begun with him here below, which is to be perfected above in its full fruition.

Holy souls rest in God, and in his will; in his will of precept as their sovereign Lord, whose commands concerning all things are right, and in the keeping of which there is great reward: In his will of providence as their absolute owner, and who does all things well: In himself as their God, their portion, and their chief good, in whom

they shall have all that they can need, or are capable of enjoying to compleat their blessedness for ever.

This can be said of none else : Men of the earth have their portion much lower, and rest in it. They are best pleased, when they have most of the world, and bid their soul take its ease, when they have goods laid up for many years. But a child of God is then most easy and at rest, when nearest to him, saying, *It is good for me to draw nigh to God*; nothing refreshes me like this; nothing quiets and comforts me like this: It is therefore *good* for me to draw nigh to God, the *best* thing in all the world.

This is true only of the children of God, They rest in him, and none else do : They have a different temper from all others, and therefore have a different center of rest. They have that likeness to God which none else have ; and therefore place the happiness of their souls in him, which none else do.

(2.) They rest in God, that is, all of them do so. This is true of every one that belongs to God, from such as are got nearest to heaven, or gone into it, down to those that are but just entered into the way thither. There is a vast difference between the people of God and the men of the world : and it lies in this, the different objects in which they place their rest. The former without exception, place it in God ; the latter as universally in the creature, how infinitely soever below him. But in this, in which all saints are distinguished from others, they agree among themselves, God the fountain of blessed-

ness is the common centre of their rest. Those among them that have most of the world, would think and own themselves miserable without God, for any thing this could do for them; and therefore humbly and solemnly profess, they will not be put off with it. They among them that have least of the world, believe God alone to be sufficient for their happiness; and therefore in the absence of all lower comforts, will acquiesce with pleasure and satisfaction in himself.

The prophet speaks the common sense of such, *Hab. iii. 17, 18. Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation, i. e. the fountain is full and inexhaustible, and so enough to my happiness, though all the streams of creature comforts be cut off and dried up. Here, therefore, will I sit and drink, and lift up my head and sing, The Lord is the portion of my inheritance, &c. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage, Psal. xvi. 5, 6. Let others take up their rest in whom they will, God is my rest, my portion, my All.*

In the midst of all earthly comforts, God is the spring and center of his people's happiness and hopes, and in the absence of these he is still the same; and therefore in him holy souls see reason still to be at rest. They can set God and an interest in him against all the wants and

trou-

troubles they meet with, and find in him enough to their satisfaction notwithstanding them. Let who will be disquieted when denied or deprived of this world, Lord give me thyself, and I have enough. Had I ten thousand worlds without God, I have nothing; but if I have him, I have all.

Thus they rest in God: *They*, and *none* else; *They*, and *every* one of their number.

4. Rest in God is *theirs*, *that is*, upon special and most comfortable grounds, it belongs to holy souls. The *Psalmist* here put in his claim to it, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul.*

Rest in God may be said to be *theirs* on a four-fold account, *viz.* By designation, purchase, promise, and choice.

(1.) By designation. The rest which the people of God have in him, is the result of his own purpose and design, taken up from his meer good pleasure and love. He foresaw and pitied the case of souls wandring from their proper rest: and how unworthy soever they were, as having forsaken him without cause, he determined to give them that *rest* in himself that could no where else be found. This was with him an early resolve which in time appears, *his setting apart every one that is godly for himself*, to take up their rest in him, in opposition to all things else, *P/. iv. 3.* They are called a *chosen* generation, a *peculiar* people, as aspiring upward, looking over all this world, and resting in God: And this is the result of a gracious purpose from eternity, taken up concerning them. This soul shall not go without a rest; and as this is what I determine to bestow, I will be its rest, *myself*. It shall rest

in me, be satisfied *in me*, and have reason to be so to all eternity. Thus the rest God's people have in him, may be said to be *theirs* by designation.

2. It is *theirs* by purchase. The rest which they wanted as *creatures*, they had forfeited as *sinners*. This therefore Christ lay down his life as the price of, and by his meritorious sufferings and death, hath opened a way for their being *restored* to it.

This is what he had in his eye in what he underwent. The rest gracious souls have in God, is peculiarly theirs, as purchased for them by the death of his son. He laid down his life for the *sheep*, suffered, saith the Apostle, for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, to God as our rest.

(3.) Gracious souls can speak of a rest in God, as *theirs* by promise. This is God's kind engagement which every one of his children may read with satisfaction, as going through this world, and as going out of it; He has said, *My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest*, Exod. xxxiii. 14.

(4.) Gracious souls have a rest in God, by their own choice. They are sensible if they have not rest in God, they can never have any: and as he is willing to receive them, and call them to him, they by a deliberate act, renounce all things else in comparison of him, and fix upon him as infinitely better, with a resolution thus to rest and take up their happiness for ever.

So much for the first thing, *viz.* That holy souls have their rest in God. They rest in God truly and only: *They* rest in God, they and none else, they and all of them: A rest in
God

God is theirs by designation, purchase, promise and choice.

II. We are to shew what rest they have in him. And here,

(1.) The rest of souls in their God is not such as tends to make them inactive: It is a rest in which all the powers of the soul are employed and taken up in thoughts of him, in desires after him, love to him, dependance upon him, and delight in him, as the most suitable, excellent and infinite Good.

2. It is a rest that is most pleasant and joyful: it has a pleasure in it begun here, and to be perfected above.

(1.) There is a pleasure and joy accompanying a soul's rest in God here, and this exceeding what the men of the world ever experience in their greatest abundance of earthly comforts. And

(2.) This pleasure which is begun here shall be carried to a higher pitch and perfected above, when the holy soul shall dwell with God in that presence of his, where there is fullness of joy, and where there are pleasures for evermore.

3. It is an eternal rest, rest in a never failing unchangeable Good, in *God* who lives for ever. It is the rest of a soul that will never die, and which as long as it lives, God has designed to *live* with himself, and be happy in himself. Whereupon,

4. The rest of holy souls in God is incomparable, such as none are capable of but they,

nor can they find such any where else but in God. No love like the love of God, no comforts like the comforts of God, no delight like that which is to be had in communion with him, no blessedness like that which consists in the full enjoyment of him. But this brings us to the

III. General, To enquire into the import of the word the *Psalmist* here useth to call his soul to the rest mentioned, *return: Return unto thy rest, O my soul.*

It is here intimated.

1. That rest to be had in God only, was what the soul was originally designed for. God made all things for himself; and the soul as it came at first out of his hand, should have made the author of its being the center of its rest.

2. That the soul in its natural state is fallen from God, its proper *rest*, and seeking it elsewhere. Sin turns off the soul from God, and they that are under the power of it, are said to be *gone aside*, and are still going farther so.

3. That no rest can be had for the soul, but in God. They that seek it elsewhere weary themselves in pursuit of vanity: and yet how busy are the most in doing so, without enquiring, *Where is God my maker who giveth songs in the night?* Job xxxv. 10. They that are now at rest in God were, when in their natural and sinful state thus wandering from him, endeavouring to find a rest in the creature, which could be had in God only.

Lastly,

Lastly, That the soul, as gracious, *is born of God*, and so is effectually invited to its rest in him, and to its return to him. Grace comes from heaven, and pointing upward as to its native skies, carries the soul to its rest there.

IV. When, or upon what occasions should a child of God use the *Psalmist's* language, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul.*

1. After converse with the world in the business of his calling *every day*. A child of God in the *midst* of what he has to do in the world, will have many thoughts of him: but at night he will solemnly, and with peculiar satisfaction return to *converse* with him. No weary traveller will be more desirous of his inn, or labourer of his home, or bodily rest, than a gracious soul to return to its rest in God, in meditations of him, and prayer to him.

“ Come, O my soul, (will such an one say,)
“ tho’ I must necessarily be employed, in what
“ relates to this world, I have something higher,
“ something better to mind. These are not the
“ things in which my happiness lies, and blessed
“ be God that it does not: I have more to do
“ with God than with any of these. And O
“ how much the sweetest and most comfortable
“ part of my time, has been that which I have
“ spent with him. Let who will therefore be
“ a stranger to him, and live without him, let
“ me not do so. *Return unto thy rest, O my*
“ *soul.*”

This is the language the saint should use at the close of *every day*.

2. As

2. As going to the sanctuary on the *Lord's day*. This is one of the *days* of *Heaven*, in which the people of God are especially to be taken up in his worship and service, as beginning the *work* of heaven here on earth.

Now, O my soul, return unto thy rest, in the vigorous, vital, joyful exercise of thy powers in the service of the living God, with whom I have this day solemnly to do. How much better is one day in his court, than a thousand elsewhere? I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness. Let who will look upon the Lord's day as a grievous interruption of their business, or pleasure, in which they had rather be engag'd, and hence say: When will the sabbath be gone? I esteem it my privilege, and would make it my delight therein to converse with God; both alone and in company; in the solemn assemblies of his people, and in my family and closet. How pleasant to me, has been the time spent in such heavenly exercises as prayer, hearing the word, singing God's praises, attending his ordinances, and keeping up the communion I have had with him in such duties as these? After several six days of labour about lower concerns, this holy one, this day of the Son of man, is once more dawned upon me, and finds me alive. Blessed be God that I have another such season as *this*, which I have reason to welcome with the most joyful affection. And now as I am to be employed in prayer and praise, in receiving the tokens of his love, and expressing my own, in admiring, adoring and blessing God,

God, in the most raised exercises of love, delight and joy, and thus to begin the work of heaven, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, to thy rest in God and his service.*

3. In and under any trouble he may meet with in the present world, it is a time for a saint to bespeak his soul to return to God as its rest. The *Psalmist* speaks of such a time as this, as what he had experienced to be a proper one for it, *ver.*

3. *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold on me : I found trouble and sorrow. Trouble without, and sorrow within. In this case he called upon the name of the Lord, and how low soever brought, the Lord helped him : and hereupon, how proper a season was it to utter himself in the text, Return unto thy rest, O my soul, to thy rest in God ?*

Let no trouble drive me from God. Trouble is not sent to that end, but to engage me more humbly and earnestly to call upon him, with more favour and frequency to come to him, and to be more taken up with him than ever. Whatever troubles I meet with, there is enough in God for my relief : he has been with me in six troubles, and in seven : when I was brought low, he helped me, and can do so still. Wherefore return unto thy rest, O my soul : give not way desponding doubts and fears, murmurs and complaints : blessed be God there is a rest before me, O my soul, return unto it.

4. *Lastly,* It becomes a saint thus to speak as departing from this world at death. When the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolving, with what words more proper can a saint breathe forth
his

his spirit than these, with an eye to God and heaven, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul?* Thou hast found, here was not thy rest. The creatures confess it is not in them, what rest thou hast had whilst here, has been in God; and what an addition will be made to it, when thou art returned to abide and dwell with him? This is that which I have waited, prayed and longed for, what I have diligently fought, and been most solicitous about. Whilst others have desired a rest upon earth, I have begged of God, and covenanted with him, that I might have mine in himself, in heaven; and he hath graciously heard my request, and promised me I should: which promise I have lived in the faith of; and now would calmly lay down my head and die. Now therefore, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.* Which brings me to the

V. Head, *viz.* To shew how the consideration of God's *bountiful dealing* with his people, and in what instances, should engage them thus to bespeak their souls *to return unto him* upon all occasions while they live, but especially when they come to die.

Many instances of God's goodness may be mentioned as motives to this.

1. His bountiful dealing with them in giving them his Son, and giving him to die for them, to purchase grace to support them under all the troubles of life; and after all to take away from them the sting of death, and enable them to go out of this world with the lively hope of glory.

O how

O how bountifully hath God dealt with me in giving me such help in life, and hope at the end of it, and what after this, will he deny or hold back? *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* Rom. viii. 32. The rest I expect by dying to pass into, I was assured, Christ was to purchase, and as the forerunner, is gone to prepare. Had not Christ died, I must have started back from the thoughts of dying, full of doubts and fears about what would befall me. But how unworthy soever I am of the least favour, *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Wherefore return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.

2. God's goodness in hearing and answering prayer, may well endear him to his people, and encourage their souls to return to him as their rest. This the *Psalmist* mentions, that he called upon the name of the Lord, and this led him to conclude, *Gracious is the Lord, and righteous: yea our God is merciful,* i. e. This I have experienced, and he is the same that ever he was: he has heard and helped me, when none else could; and I trust he will not now reject and cast me off, but continue to support me whilst I live, and afterwards answer my dying request, to receive my departing spirit: Wherefore return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.

3. The goodness of God in the care of his providence from first to last in our younger, and
in

in our riper years, may farther encourage to this. *How precious* in this respect have been God's thoughts towards me? *How great is the sum of them?* They are more in number than I can reckon up. His undeserved mercy gave me being, and cast my lot in a land and place of light: his providence hath protected and watched over me in one place, and another, in all the various cases and conditions I have been in. As going through this wilderness to the promised land, he hath given his angels charge concerning me, and been a cloud to shelter me in the day, and a pillar of fire to guide and comfort me by night. When storms hath risen he hath provided for me chambers of rest, and brought me into them, and in the midst of dangers hid me as in his pavilion. From how many evils hath he delivered me? and with how many blessings filled up my days? How often hath he strengthened me, when flesh and heart have been ready to fail, and been better to me than even either my hopes or desires? Never did God break his promise with me, never did he fail me, nor forsake me, &c. And when so much mercy hath encompassed me thro' my pilgrimage thus far, how unreasonable would it be to distrust him at last, or entertain any other than the most amiable thoughts of him? Surely there is none like the God of *Israel*, who rideth upon the heavens for his people's help, and in his excellency upon the sky. The eternal God hath been my refuge and underneath everlasting arms, *Deut xxxiii. 26, 27. Return therefore unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

Lastly,

Lastly, A child of God may thus speak from experience of the grace displayed in the saving change made upon him ; and abiding upon him. The love and grace of God pitied me in my blood, fetched me from the gates of hell, and made me sensible of my need of a Saviour, and then kindly perswaded and enabled me to receive him, and so brought me into his family, and put me among his children, and hath in the most compassionate manner treated me as such. How often hath he found me weeping, and then kindly wiped away my tears, and calmed and quieted my troubled soul ? How often hath he resolved my doubts, and expelled my fears ? And when I have provoked him to withdraw for a time, how seasonably hath he returned, and said to my troubled soul, *be still*. With how ravishing a voice hath he called me, *child*, and given me leave, and by his Spirit enabled me to cry, *Abba, Father* ?

He hath shewn to my faith the glory of the *New Jerusalem*, and the blessed company of those holy spirits that stand about his throne, and given me good hope that I shall be at last with them ; and in the mean time refreshed me with the first-fruits of the promised land, as the earnest of the full possession.

How many comfortable hours have I had in communion with him, in publick assemblies, and in my private retirements, under the influence of his spirit, and the manifestations of his presence ? He hath drawn forth my desires, and then met them with comfortable tokens of his favour and love. And when I go from hence,
it

it is to be nearer to him than ever, more happy than ever; yea, to be perfectly so, and change no more: Wherefore *return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

APPLICATION.

To close all with a word of *use*.

1. Have holy souls their rest in God, how amiable and great is the change that grace hath made upon them? For *naturally* they are inclined to live without God in the world, as well as others, and to take up their rest in lower good; but being born from heaven, they can no longer do so. God is now more than all the world to them; and if they have not rest in him, they can have none for ever. Should all the monarchs upon earth cast down their crowns at my feet, (saide a gracious soul, that spake his inward sense) and say, *All these are thine*, I would answer, These cannot content or satisfy me. Why? because they are not God. Should all the honours and wealth of the world be heaped upon me, I would say, It is not enough. Why? because I have a soul to be provided for, that none of these can suit or satisfy, and nothing short of God in Christ can be my rest.

2. This may help you to pass a judgment upon this world, as altogether insufficient to be the rest of a soul. The wisest and best upon earth universally renounce it as their portion, and as taught of God, look for rest only in himself. What folly therefore are they guilty of, who look for rest below, which is to look for light in darkness, life in death? In thus looking, they
loose

lose their labour, and their poor souls are in danger of perishing for ever.

3. Have holy souls their rest in God, let us prove ourselves such, by taking up our *rest* with them. If it be not yet done, let it be no longer deferred. Why should you *spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not*? When God calls you to hearken to his voice, and, by Christ, to return to him, that ye may *eat that which is good*, and have your *soul delight itself in fatness*, and be provided of an adequate portion in which you may rest and rejoice for ever?

Lastly, Let believers record God's gracious dealings with them, and frequently review and read them over. This will endear the thoughts of him, and confirm their trust in him. Whilst others are running from him, and had rather be any where than with him, a child of God may say at the close of every day, at every season of worship, especially on the Lord's day; and under any trouble of life, and even in the view and approach of death, *Return unto thy rest, &c.*

God grant we may be all of this number, and afterwards rest with them now, for ever.

S E R M O N VII.

PSALM CXIX. 92.

*Unless thy law had been my delights, I
should then have perished in mine af-
fliction.*

THIS psalm is by far the longest in the book : and as it is long, so it is most excellent and engaging. It commends the scripture or word of God to us under several notions, as his *Statutes, Judgments, Precepts, Testimonies*, and here he calls it, *his law*. *David* found it of use to him at all times ; and now he speaks of the advantage he had from it in a time of distress : *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction.*

We have here set before us by this *Psalmist* :

1. The case which he had been in, and which he now refers to, one sad and sinking. He was under such affliction that he was ready to perish ; which seems to include inward and outward trouble at once ; trials without, and pressures within.
2. What it was that gave him relief, and this when nothing else could, *viz. the law of God.*
3. How

3. How he looked back upon this relief received, *namely*, with thankfulness to God, to whom he speaks, and records it for the encouragement and direction of others, *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction.*

Doct. *The word of God has been the great relief of his people, even under trials wherein they felt themselves ready to sink: this they have found, and are ready to own for his glory, and the good of those that come after them, that through patience and comfort of the scripture, they also may have hope.*

In speaking to this I shall endeavour to shew,

- I. What there is in the *law* or word of God, which tends to the delight of his people in distress.
- II. Who they are that it actually delights, and its fitness for that purpose.
- III. How it does so.
- IV. When it does so.
- V. The nature of the consolation or delight it affords.

Lastly, The Use.

I. To shew what there is in the word of God, which tends to the delight of his people in distress.

1. In the word there are made the most comfortable discoveries. As,

(1.) That God stands in the most endearing relations to his people. He is their Shepherd, their Father, their Friend, their God, and will deal with them as becometh one who stands all these ways related to them: notwithstanding
K 2 their

their revolt from him, and rebellion against him, he is become the God of peace, reconciled to them.

(2.) That the way was made for the settling of these endeared relations in which God stands to his people, by the sufferings and death of his own Son. It was he that made peace by the blood of his cross; and he was sent from heaven in order to this, and suffered, *the just for the unjust*, that he might bring them to God, who in and thro' him hath declared himself well-pleased. And how great comfort may it yield, that the blessed God should have the salvation of man so much at heart, and to be at so much expence to make it sure, and carry it up to the highest pitch?

(3.) That God hereupon is become the Father of mercies, and *the God of all consolation*, ready freely to give out all the blessings which Christ hath purchased at the dearest rate.

(4.) That a way of access is now open, whereby the children of God may come to him, their Father, upon all occasions, in hope of obtaining mercy, and finding grace to help them in time of need.

(5.) That the spirit of grace is come from heaven to take up his abode in such as are the people of God, and to be their guide thither.

(6.) That the eternal state of rewards is laid open to their faith, the glory and blessedness of the upper world, as that which they are entitled to, and which the Captain of their salvation is gone to make ready for them against their coming.

5. How reviving and delightful are such discoveries as these!

2. In the word of God are *the most comfortable promises*, fitted to yield delight from their *nature*, their *number*, and their *extent*.

Thick and richly is the bible set with these, like the firmament with stars: and what condition can a saint be in, which some of these will not suit? How endless would it be to instance in the particulars of these. There are promises of supply in want, of support under burdens, of direction in doubts, of succour when tempted, of strength in weakness, of help when faint, and of salvation when dying. Where can a believer open his bible, when in any condition, but he may find matter of delight in what God has assured? Particularly in his promises of pardon and acceptance at present, of heaven at last, and of his being kept safe, and having all things to work together for his good, in his way thither.

(1.) How sweet is the promise of the pardon of sin, and acceptance with God, when read with application? This removes the ground of all trouble and disquiet, as freeing the soul from the fears of the wrath to come, and the danger of the second death, and is the foundation of that peace of God within, that passeth understanding. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,* Psal. xxxii. 1, 2.

What joy may diffuse itself over that soul to whom God says, *I, even I am he that blotteth*

out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins? Isa. xliii. 25. What has he to fear, who is freed from condemnation, whose guilt is washed off by the blood of atonement, and being justified by faith, has peace with God thro' our Lord Jesus Christ? To such every affliction may well seem light and little, and every mercy may be doubled, as coming from the hand of love.

(2.) All happiness is summed up in the promise of heaven at last, and so can't but be big with the truest delight now. *This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life,* 1 John ii. 25. What can he meet with that should break his peace, or damp his joy, that has an interest in this promise? Let his cross be as heavy as it will, he has a crown before him, to put in the balance against it: and no suffering of the present time, is worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. What comfort must it yield a child of God, as often as he looks to heaven, to be able to say; *There is my Father, That is my Inheritance:* I have a promise of it now, made me by one who cannot lie, and e'er long, I shall have it in full possession. Tho' it be a vale of tears I am now in, and death itself what I must pass through; how reviving is it to think, that I am now in the Way to that place, where all tears shall be wiped away from mine eyes, and where is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore? And shall my state be so bright and blessed in the end? What delight then should it yield me now? Add hereto,

(3.) The

(3.) The promise of God's presence by the way, that all things shall work together for his people's good. He speaks to every one of them by name, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*, Heb. xiii. 5. *And we know that all things shall work together for good, to them that love God*, Rom. viii. 28. *No temptation shall overtake them, but what they shall be enabled to bear*, 1 Cor. x. 13. And whatever trials they meet with, they shall keep their standing under them, and through them *by the power of God through faith unto salvation*.

3. In the word of God are the *most comfortable examples*. There are examples of God's compassion and grace in appearing for his people; as in the case of *David, Job*, and the *three Hebrew Worthies* that were cast into the fiery furnace, and brought out unhurt. And what God has done for those that are gone before them, he is able to do for others, and would hence encourage them to expect it, in submission to his wisdom and will: and it is for this end that such examples are recorded, that we from the scripture may have comfort and hope.

4. In the word of God are the *most comfortable provisions*, and these suitable to the various characters which his saints are to bear, and the states they are in while they are in this world.

As they are *pilgrims and strangers*, its *precepts and directions* mark out their way; shewing them the narrow path in which they are to walk; and its warnings and threatenings discover the snares they are to avoid, that they may be safe. The word of God is a lamp un-

to our feet, and a light unto our path; a light shining in a dark place, unto which we are to take heed, and shall find it our interest and comfort to do so, *Psalms* cxix. 105. 2 *Pet.* i. 19.

As engaged in a *warfare*, this acquaints us what armour we are to put on, and make use of; who are our adversaries, and what are their policy and strength, and in what way we are to fight, with assurance of success, against them.

As running *a race*, it cautions us against that which would clog and hinder us; bidding us lay aside every weight, and the sin that does easily beset us; and then directs us in what manner we are to run, *namely, with patience, looking unto Jesus, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* And the crown for which we are to run, is held up, as it were, in view, with this title, *To him that overcometh, shall it be given.*

As *probationers for eternity*, we are acquainted with our work, and where our strength lies for the doing it; and how it is to be fetched in, and then improved. It shews much of the blessed world we are passing towards, and the marks and characters by which we are to try our title to it, and know if we are heirs of it, as being sanctified, and made meet to be partakers of that inheritance of the saints in light.

These are some of the things in the word of God, which may be said to be greatly delightful.

II. As

II. As to the persons to whose delight it actually conduces, They are the children of God, and none else.

None but they are prepared to take in the consolation of the word ; and it hath enough in it for the delight of all that are such.

None but the children of God are prepared to take in the consolation of the word.

1. As they only are spiritually enlightened to discern the great and comfortable things contained in it, enlightened in a manner in which no others are : *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

2. As they have the highest value for the word of God, this prepares them for receiving consolation from it. This *Psalmist* often discovered his value for it ; *O how love I thy law !* saith he, *Pf. cxix. 97.* And *Psal. xix. 10.* The judgments of the Lord *are more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb.*

3. As they have their hearts and ways suited to the word of God, this is another reason of the delight they fetch from it. *For they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh, and take pleasure in them ; but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.* The comforts of the word are spiritual ; and only the spiritual heart, as it is renewed by grace, can taste and relish them, *Rom. viii. 5.* The delight which the people of God have from the word, is a privilege peculiar to themselves : and this word hath
enough

enough to give delight to all of their number. In it there is balm to heal, treasures to enrich, food to nourish, cordials to refresh, provision for our being cleansed and sanctified now, and perfectly saved at last. In distresses inward and outward, under whatever evils we feel or are liable to, when nothing else can comfort us, the word can do it.

III. How is it that it does this ;

I answer,

1. As believed, considered, and applied by the saints. *I had fainted*, saith the Psalmist, *unless I had believed*, &c. Psal. xxvii. 13. He who delights in the law of the Lord, meditateth in that law day and night, *Psal.* i. 2.

2. As impressed and set home by the spirit. Whatever comfort we have in the word, it is from it as made efficacious by the Spirit: who therefore is called the Comforter, because from the word alone without his gracious influence co-operating with it, nothing of this could be found.

IV. When may a child of God find comfort from God's word ?

I answer in general : At all times, and in every state and condition : but particularly, under the times of sore trial and affliction which God may see fit to appoint him while he lives, and under his last trial, when he is called to go through the valley of the shadow of death.

1. The word of God may be the comfort of his people in the times of great and sore affliction, which they fall into while they live. They are not exempted from such times, nor left

left destitute of what may support them in them. *David*, thought himself ready to perish, and that he should really have done so in the afflictive time referred to in the text, had not the law of God been his delight. This not only saves from perishing, but is a spring of consolation in time of need. And it is so,

(1.) As it acquaints the suffering saint, that these have been the lot of some of God's choicest favourites in their way to heaven. How evil soever may be the time, and whatever be his case, yet looking into the bible, he may be satisfied he is not dealt with in a manner unusual. Even the Captain of our salvation lived in an evil day, and went through sufferings to glory: And under whatever of these we meet with, how great comfort may it yield to us, that they are no more, nay unconceivably less than our blessed Lord endured before us?

(2.) As the same word assures the saint, that afflictions are consistent with God's special love to his people, and their covenant relation to him. Having loved his own, he loveth them unto the end; and he would not be thought to have rejected or cast those off, whom he may have seen fit to cast down. He may visit the iniquities of his own people with a rod, and their transgressions with stripes: but he has declared, nevertheless, his loving-kindness he will not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail, *Pf. lxxxix. 32, 33.* Whatever he takes from his people or lays upon them, he continues their God still; which is ground enough for their using the prophets words, in their most distressed cases.

Hab.

Hab. iii. 17, 18. 19. Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord is my strength, &c.

(3.) As the word teaches the children of God, that afflictions are not only consistent with the love of God, but often the instances of it: *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you, as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?* Heb. xii. 6, 7.

(4.) As it farther acquaints them, that though afflictions are deserved by sin, they are laid upon the people of God with a design to cure it. *Isa. xxvii. 9. By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sins.* We are chastened of the Lord, that we may be partakers of his holiness. We are in heaviness when need is: and whether we think so, or not, our heavenly Father knows our need of being afflicted.

If we belong to his house in general, and are each of us houses of his spirit in particular, our heavenly Father knoweth we have need of affliction. As an house wants to be repaired or cleansed, so do we. It is known, a house neglected will grow out of order, and visibly decay; and so too often do the people of God, when left to themselves for a while. It may be said of many of us, as we well know, Here is one who
was

was once zealous and fervent, laborious and diligent, serious and watchful, whose love was flaming, his desires after God and Christ vigorous, his faith strong, his mortification to the present world remarkable, and his mind, discourse and conversation favouring of a better, and shewing an evident tendency to it : How fervently would he pray ? How diligently hear ? How exactly walk ? But alas ! how sad a change is there now visible in him ? How cold and formal, secure and indifferent, carnal and earthly is the man become ? And where would these things issue, did not God reclaim him by some awakening affliction, which sufficiently proves its necessity and usefulness. *Before I was afflicted, says David, I went astray ; but now have I kept thy word.*

In ease and prosperity saints themselves are too apt to go backward, and suffer decays ; abate of their watchfulness against sin, and diligence in duty, and so of their advances towards heaven ; and instead thereof, to indulge the flesh, pursue the world, and sink in a great measure into the temper of it. And in this case, what need is there of some sore affliction to bring them back to themselves and God, and repair the disorders they were running into ?

By these we all are led to remember from whence we are fallen, and excited to repent and do our first works, to strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die ; and so our ruin is prevented, and we are reduced to a better frame.

A house will gather dust and soil, and so needs to be cleansed : and corruption is as apt to grow
even

even in saints themselves, to purge away which, affliction is necessary.

The troubles wherewith God sees fit to visit his people, have a tendency to this, by discovering corruption, and withdrawing the fuel that fed it, and putting us upon earnest prayer for the Spirit's aid, to mortify and subdue it. And thus, though *no chastening is for the present joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, unto them that are exercised thereby*, Heb. xii. 11.

If God has put us among his *children*, this character speaks our need of affliction. For,

(1.) Children in a family are prone to grow proud and vain, rebellious and stubborn, and stand in need of correction to keep them in their places, and hold them to their duty: and the children of God have equal need of affliction to keep them in subjection to him, and to reduce them from their wanderings. And when it works kindly, this will be their language. *Hosea vi. 1. Come and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us, he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.* Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have born chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me, and if I have done iniquity, I will do so no more. Thus, to yield to God, is a temper very becoming his children; to bring them to which, it is often necessary they should first be melted down in the furnace of affliction.

(2.) Children have many things to learn, in which they need to be instructed: And the children of God have equal need to be instructed by

him; and in order to it, he brings them into the school of affliction.

Here he sensibly acquaints them with the vanity and emptiness of all this world to help to wean them from it, and shews them, they are never to find their rest in it, and that it is in vain there to expect it.

This lesson they need an affliction to set home, as being so apt to say in prosperity, *It is good to be here*. But with an afflicted saint, the world has lost its charms, and appears, as indeed it is, full of vanity and vexation, a place where he cannot live always, and does not desire it; looking upon their case as miserable who have nothing to expect or enjoy beyond it. In this school God teaches them the evil of sin, that has let in so much misery upon the world, and is the procuring cause of all they suffer, and the worth of an interest in Christ, and a title to heaven; and how much they are concerned to make sure of both, as nothing else can stand them in stead, and keep them from fainting and perishing in their affliction. Upon such accounts *David* cries out, *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teaches him out of thy law*, Psalm xciv. 12.

5. The Word of God tends to the comfort of his people in affliction, as acquainting them, that though for wise ends God brings them under the rod, he considers their frame, and remembers that they are but dust, and will not increase the tryal, either as to degree, or continuance, beyond what he will enable them to bear.

In measure will he debate with them; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of his eastwind, *Isa.* xxvii. 8.

6. Lastly,

6. *Lastly*, It is greatly reviving to learn from the word, that under times of affliction God has chosen to let out his love more freely to his people, than at other seasons. And who would not be reconciled to the rod, to know and taste more of his promise to the church, *Hosea ii. 14. I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her ?*

Thus the word of God is a store-house of comfort to his people, under their various afflictions while they live.

2. It is fitted to delight them when they are called to die : and to do this, as teaching them two things, *viz.*

(1.) That as dying God will be with them.

(2.) That immediately after death they shall be with him.

(1.) They are taught from the word, that as dying God will be with them. In this he goes farther in his declaration to his people, than *Ruth* did to *Naomi*, her mother. *Ruth*, when entreated by her to go back, answered, *whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.* If nothing in life can do it, death will separate the dearest friends among mankind. But God having guided his people even unto death, will not then take leave of them, not when flesh and heart are failing them, but as he lives still, he will be with them still.

Though father and mother, physicians and friends forsake God's people as going off the stage of
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of the world, and they are left alone as to any of these, they are not altogether alone ; for the Father is with them. He thus bespeaks every one of his children, *Isa. xliii. 2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee : and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.* And this does not only extend to them under all the evils they meet with whilst in the world, but when going out of it. Thus the *Psalmist* encourageth himself in God, *yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for thou art with me.*

(2.) They are taught from the word, that after death they shall be with God, that he having guided them by his counsel so far, will afterwards receive them to glory. When their earthly tabernacle is dissolved, they have a building of God, an house not made with hands, where they shall dwell in that presence of his, where there is fulness of joy, and at whose right-hand are pleasures for evermore.

There is one thing more under the doctrinal part, *viz.*

V. The nature of the delight or consolation derived from the word. And

I. The delight or consolation derived from the word is truly *divine*, and the consolation of God.

It has the word of God for its ground, and the Spirit of God for its author. It comes from heaven, is the beginning of it, and leads to it ; and it is no wonder then that it carries the soul with so much triumph through all the trials it may meet with upon the way. When God puts gladness

into the heart, it is such as the whole creation beside is unable to give.

2. The consolation and delight, which the people of God have in his word, as being divine, is certainly *real* and *solid*: Not a name only, or fancied or imaginary; though it is better felt by the happy souls themselves in which it is, than it can be made known to others.

Such expressions as those have a firm ground to support them, *Psalms* cxix. 14. *I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage*, ver. 54. *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart*, ver. 111.

The causes of it are not imaginary, and the effects of this delight are distinguishing, even readiness for any duty, and submission to the will of God in any trial. The joy of the Lord is the strength of his people.

3. It is *rational* and *justifiable*. If any delight in the world hath a just ground, it is that which the people of God have in and from his word: they have just reason therefore, to believe the scriptures to be the word of God. And upon a serious search, they find upon themselves the marks by which the children of God are there described: Hence they are enabled to infer their interest, in the privileges of such; and applying them to themselves, to see abundant reason for peace and comfort; which how much soever scorned or disvalued by others, they find to be real, and would hold fast as the most desirable thing in all the world.

4. The delight which the people of God have in his law, is *holy*. It is built upon an holy word, wrought in them, by the sanctifying Spirit, and leads to greater holiness, and so to more raised degrees of itself. It is accompanied with sorrow for sin, contempt of the world, desire of heaven, and an earnest endeavour to become more and more meet for it.

5. It is a delight that is sometimes *vigorous* and *strong*.

God is willing that it should be so in all the heirs of promise: But there are degrees in this, as well as in grace. Some can sing in the way to *Zion*; others go mourning like the dove, so as to give room for that question of *Eliphaz*, *Are the consolations of God small with thee?* Job xv. 11. *i. e.* Are thy sorrows so many and grievous, as to be more powerful to sink, than the consolations of God to help thee up? Is it a work too hard for God to put an end to thy afflictions, scatter the clouds, and turn thy sorrow into joy? Can any thing be too hard for the Almighty? And is not his goodness infinite and unmeasurable? His promises exceeding great and precious? Hath he not balm enough in store to heal thy wounds? and treasure enough in stock to repair thy losses? Say, thy case is as dark and distressed as ever any ones was, thy sufferings as sore as thy will, they are but the sufferings of a creature; but the comforts before thee are the consolations of God. Are the consolations of God small with thee? But let the most dejected among the righteous know, that light is sown for them, and joy and gladness for the upright in heart.

6. *Lastly*, The delight which the people of God have in his word, is the *fore-taste of heaven*, and is working upward to meet that fulness of joy which there is in God's presence, and to mingle with those rivers of pleasure that flow at his right-hand for evermore.

APPLICATION.

1. Is there so much in the word of God to delight the soul? What a wonderful vouchsafement is the Bible to the world and church? O what a dark disconsolate place would this earth be without it? Let us bless God for this word, and seriously study it and meditate upon it.

2. Get into the number of the children of God, who are the only ones prepared to take the comfort of his word.

3. Under all your troubles run to the word of God for relief; and in conversing with it, pray for the Spirit to enlighten your minds, sanctify your hearts, fit you to take comfort in it, and so to work in you the comfort he hath fitted you for.

And as ever you would have solid consolation,

1. Value and labour after grace and holiness, as the ground of it. Be as earnest for grace, as you are for comfort and peace.

2. Expect the comfort you need in God's way, by humbling yourselves and turning to God in case of sin, and by attending his ordinances and the institutions of his house.

3. Wait for comfort in God's time, and presume not to prescribe to him, but continue to pray and look up for it.

For

For your encouragement, consider his nature, that he is ready and willing to comfort : Consider his relation to his people, he is their Father, and the most tender and compassionate one : And if earthly parents know how to give good things to their children, how much more will your heavenly Father give his holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace and comfort, to them that ask it of him ? Consider his omniscience and omnipresence : He knows what comfort we want, in what season and to what degree ; and he is able to raise up, how low soever we are reduced, and how long soever seemingly left. And may the depth of your distress under present trouble, add to your praising songs, when divine consolations shall change the scene, and your heavenly Father shall call to you, saying, Come up hither, the days of your mourning are ended.

S E R M O N VIII.

CANT. I. 12.

*While the King sitteth at his table, my
spikenard sendeth forth the smell
thereof.*

THESE words are the believers testimony from experience of the blessed effects which Christ's presence in his ordinances hath upon pious souls, which wait upon him under them.

In the fore-going verses, Christ takes notice with complacency of the graces wherewith his spouse or church was adorned: That *her cheeks were comely with rows of jewels, and her neck with chains of gold.* And she acknowledges the sensible comfort of her graces to be owing to influence from, and communion with him under his ordinances: For in the text she saith, *While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.*

In which words we have,

I. The title she gives Christ, *The King*: as shewing thereby the sense she had of his dignity and dominion, and also of her subjection to him, and dependance upon him. In the following

lowing verses, she calls him *her beloved*, or the object of her special affection: But this does not take off from her reverence for him, and godly fear of him: nor doth her reverence for him lessen her love to him. To them that believe, Christ is precious under every character he wears; as a *King* to command and rule, as a *prophet* to teach, and a *priest* to make atonement for their sins, and intercede for them with God the Father.

2. What she says of him from her own experience, as a witness to his condescension and grace, *The King sitteth at his table*: which may refer to all the ordinances of the gospel, in which, as at a feast, he meets and entertains his people, supping with them, and they with him, as his own expression is, *Rev. iii. 20.* His presence in his institutions, and the gracious manifestations he makes of himself to his members who in the way of his appointments wait for him, are here meant, *The King sitteth at his table.* How far soever he is above us, he is yet pleased, in the most endearing way, to vouchsafe and give proofs of his presence with us.

3. The happy fruit or effect of Christ's sitting at his table, upon the believer who is admitted to sit with him. *My spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.*

This is a figurative description of the grace wherewith the believer is furnished from Christ his living head; he *receiving of his fulness, and grace for grace*, John i. 16. and having that grace put into exercise, by his approach and influence as the sun of righteousness, under his

ordinances. *Spikenard* was a precious Eastern plant of a pleasing smell, as was also the ointment made of it; a pound of which was worth *three hundred pence*. With this, how costly forever, *Mary*, in token of her esteem and gratitude, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped them with her hair: and such was its fragancy, that the whole house, it is said, was filled with the odour of the ointment, *John* xii. 3, &c. This was done while Christ was sitting at table, the account of which seems to have a designed reference to our text.

Grace is compared to *spikenard* for its preciousness and value; and the sending forth of its smell, denotes *that grace*, as discovering itself in a lively, fresh and vigorous manner. It is as ointment *poured forth*, most pleasing to Christ, and to all that love him too; they rejoicing in the honour paid him by themselves and others, through a lively exercise of grace.

Christ has his *chambers*, and his *banqueting-house*, into which he is pleased to bring his friends for spiritual entertainment, and to give them the fore-tastes of heaven in the way to it. And when in his ordinances, particularly that of the Lord's supper, where the King sits at his own table, serious christians, the invited guests, have their graces in exercise; their hearts broken by repentance, raised by faith, inflamed with holy love and desire towards Christ, and joyful expectations of seeing and being with him in glory. Then the *spikenard* may be said to send forth the smell thereof, when grace shews itself in such

a way as Christ will be pleased with, and reckon himself honoured by striving that it may, is paying our homage to him in a spiritual manner, as the wise men from the east did once, by opening their treasures, and presenting him with frankincense and myrrhe.

4. We have the connexion of this effect with its cause, or the presence of Christ, and the dependance of this upon it: *While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.* When this is vouchsafed, grace stirs and acts, flows and flourishes, and thus continues to do while his presence and influence continues: but when this is withdrawn or suspended, grace droops and languishes, and so little discovery is made of it by the exercise, that it becomes like flowers withering, or spices unstirred, which send not forth the delightful fragrancie by which they should be known.

From the whole we may observe,

- I. *That grace in the friends of Christ is highly valuable and precious.*
- II. *That Christ's presence as king in his ordinances, particularly at his table, is that which draws forth the graces of his people into that exercise, which is most pleasing to him, and comfortable to themselves. While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sends forth the smell thereof.*

I. *Grace in the friends of Christ is highly valuable and precious.* It being compared to *spikenard*, denotes its worth.

Under this, I shall only briefly tell you,

I. What grace is.

II. From

II. From whence its worth may be collected.

And

III. The use that we may make of the whole.

I. To tell you what *grace is*.

Grace in scripture most usually denotes these *two things, namely, God's goodwill to us, and his good work in us.*

1. His goodwill to us lost sinners in and thro' his Son, and this as revealed and tendered to us in the gospel. We read that the grace of God bringeth salvation, *Tit. ii. 11.* and that by grace we are saved, *Eph. ii. 8.* This grace of God, or his goodwill towards men, is the spring of all the blessings he bestows upon them.

2. Grace denotes God's good work in us, in all his people, which is the fruit or effect of that goodwill which he had in his heart concerning them. Thus saith the apostle, speaking as a christian, *Unto every one of us is grace given, &c. Ephes. iv. 7.* And as Christ is head over all things to the church, *of his fulness* all that are recovered from a state of nature, *have received, and grace for grace, John i. 16.*

It is of grace in this sense, as a good work in us, that we are now enquiring about, what it is.

It is represented in scripture under several characters, *viz.* as a new creation, as that by which we are born again, raised from the death of sin to newness of life ; as that by which we are effectually called, converted, and sanctified, &c. Upon which, a child of God so vastly differs from his former state, that every one of this number is stiled a *new creature.*

When

When the Spirit of God has been savingly at work, to the doing away all old things, and making all things new: when an holy light is shed upon the mind, and a god-like temper and disposition is produced in the soul, bringing it to hate what God hates, and love and chuse what God loves; to grieve upon the account of sin, and prize and rely upon Jesus Christ: when it is made careful to please God by doing his will, as the work of life, and promote his glory as the *end* of life: when the man is led calmly to resign to the will of God, as wisest and best; has his chief desires after him, his highest delight in him, and hath pleasing and joyful hopes of seeing and being for ever with him, as his portion and rest, this is *grace*. And if we could say no more, how valuable a thing does it appear to be?

But to bring our hearts to be in love with it.

II. Let us enquire from whence its worth and excellency may be collected. Now

I. Grace in the friends of Christ may be said to be valuable and precious, as having so much of heaven in it. And if you ask, How?

I answer,

It comes from heaven,
It marks out for it,
It leads to it, And
It will issue in it.

(1.) Grace comes from heaven. Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, *James* i. 17. And grace in a special manner does so. It is
God's

God's own offspring, and every thing relating to it must be ascribed to God.

The purpose is *his*, that any such favour should be bestowed on any of the children of men, the sinful progeny of an apostate head: the mediator by whom grace is purchased, and in whom, as our head of recovery, it is treasured up, is of his own appointing: the persons that are to be the subjects of this grace, and in whose hearts it is wrought, are of his own chusing, and this from everlasting: and the actual implanting of grace, in the first principles and habits, and all its after-growth, is owing to the operation of his own Spirit. In these respects saints are of God, begotten and born of him. It is God that sends his Son to bless his people, in turning away every one of them from their iniquities, *Acts* iii. 26. It is of God that any are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto such sanctification, *1 Cor.* i. 30. Hence they are said to be God's *workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works*, *Eph.* ii. 10. He blebseth us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Grace comes from heaven.

(2.) It marks out for heaven. So great is the change made where grace is communicated, as speaks the Author to be God, and the soul that is the subject of it, designed for a better world and state. The finger of God may be read in it, and the renewed soul in which so much of
heaven

heaven is begun, shall have its final blessedness and portion there.

Believers are such of whom the world is not worthy; and however they may be disvalued among men, they are honourable in the sight of God, and in the most solemn manner shall be owned to be so, another day. God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city; and also prepared them for it, and made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. He that hath wrought us for the self-same is God, who hath also given us the earnest of his Spirit. The excellency and greatness of what is done upon the saints confesseth a Deity; and what he has wrought within, points upward to the glory reserved above.

Under this character Christ again and again commends his disciples to his Father, *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*, John xvii. 14. They are of another, a more excellent spirit, than the rest of the world, which is God's mark upon them, as designed for something higher, and something better with himself.

(3.) Grace tends to heaven. It is the duty, and in some measure the temper of such as are risen with Christ, to set their affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God: and whoever can look downward for his happiness, the *Psalmist's* language is what every gracious soul can make his own, it being expressive of his desire and choice, *As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied,*

ed, when I awake, with thy likeness. Grace teaches those in whom it is, to expect and lay up their treasure in heaven; and where the treasure is, the heart will be also, aspiring after it, and pressing towards it, as their only quieting felicity and rest.

(4.) Grace will issue in heaven. The soul prepared and marked out for glory, and tending to it, shall, in the appointed season, be crowned with it. Grace here, is glory begun; and God will not forsake the work of his own hands, but perfect it in the day of Jesus Christ. The great preparations made above, and within, shall not be made in vain. For every soul, made partaker of grace, there is a mansion made ready in glory. Our Lord, who came from heaven, and was well acquainted with it, assures us of this, and that this was the errand on which he ascended thither. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go away, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also, *John* xiv. 2, 3. As many as follow him in the regeneration, shall be enthroned, and reign with him. The heavenly inheritance is reserved for them, and they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

This is the first thing that speaks the excellency of grace, its having so much of heaven in it.

2. The necessity of grace is a further evidence of its value.

Without

Without grace we cannot please God upon earth, nor be admitted to the enjoyment of him in heaven; as into the *New Jerusalem* there entereth nothing that defileth. Without grace we are unfit for the work of life, and must be eternally miserable at the end of it; as hell is the doleful residence awaiting graceless souls. Nothing can supply the want of grace, or stand us in stead without it. This is the principal thing, and whatever else we can gain that leaves us destitute of this, we are notwithstanding lost.

It is grace that crowns all outward mercies, and speaks and makes them mercies indeed; and nothing but this can sweeten afflictions, and make our heaviest crosses light. The soul that no grace, has no interest in Christ, and so no hope of pardon or justification thro' him; for they that are pardoned in his blood, are such as are also sanctified by his spirit. God indeed, is said to justify the ungodly, but not those that continue so: if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Whatever claim others may make to him from external profession, it will avail them nothing: for he will say to the workers of iniquity, *Depart from me, I know you not.* They that are without grace, are unlike to God, loathsome in his sight, under the dominion of sin, led captive by Satan, vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, and in danger every moment of being sealed up under it.

This is the deplorable state of all by nature: If any are set free, it must be by grace. So necessary is this to all that are saved, that to make way for it, the Son of God assumed our nature,
and

and submitted to the bitterest sufferings and death. He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works : as by the nature of the thing, as well as the constitution of heaven, *impure souls cannot see or be happy in an holy God.* The heirs of heaven must first become the excellent of the earth, or they can never come there. Likeness and love to God are absolutely necessary to all that would dwell with him. God is light, and dwells in it, and unconverted sinners are darkness ; and what communion hath light with darkness ? To be in heaven is to be with Christ ; but graceless souls are enemies to him : and what concord hath Christ with *Belial* ? In a word, without regeneration there is no salvation. Sanctification is necessary to heaven, and an essential qualification for entering into it. Our Lord over and over, in the most solemn manner declares this : *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,* John iii. 3, 5.

If that which is absolutely necessary be *valuable*, *grace* is so.

3. The excellency of grace may be argued, from the happy distinction it makes in them.

As it distinguishes those in whom it is wrought.

From fallen angels,

From the rest of mankind, and

From their former selves.

(1.) From fallen angels. With whatever moral amiable qualities and perfections they were at first endowed, upon their leaving their own habitation,

bitation, and rebelling against God, they lost their excellency, and of bright and beautiful creatures, are now become most abominable, enemies to God, and to all that is good; filled with evil, and as it were turned into it. Hence the devil is called the *evil* and the wicked *one*: he is destitute of grace, and irrecoverably excluded the regions of glory, being reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day. This is the case of those fallen spirits.

But at how wide and happy a distance are they set from them who are made partakers of grace? Whilst God spared not the angels that sinned, but left them to be monuments of his wrath, gracious souls have a Saviour provided for them; the sanctifying Spirit has been, and is still at work in them; heaven is set open before them, whither they are tending, and where none of those spirits that kept not their first estate therein, can ever come.

Grace distinguishes from fallen angels.

(2.) From the rest of mankind. We read of some redeemed from among men, *Rev. xiv. 4.* All the *chosen* of God are so; and being effectually called, and renewed by grace, they are a peculiar people. There are none like them in all the world.

In their natural state, whilst lying among the children of wrath, this was God's voice to them by the gospel, *Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters,* 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. To this they

are enabled unfeignedly to answer, *Lo we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.* After this they are no longer of the world, as others are; though they remain for a time in it.

The apostle speaks thus of saints indeed, *We are of God*, and the whole world lieth in wickedness, 1 *John* v. 19. And again, We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, 1 *Cor.* ii. 12. By this Spirit they are not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of their minds; and so walk not according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience; but have their conversation in heaven, as being under the conduct of the Spirit that came from thence.

Their former companions may wonder that they run not with them to the same excess of riot; but the reason is *within them*: grace hath taken possession of their hearts, and by a power going along with the gospel discovery of salvation, they are taught to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil world. As being become truly wise, their way is above to depart from hell beneath: and what numbers soever they meet crowding the road to destruction, they will not follow a multitude to do evil; but in the midst of a common degeneracy, will make the word their rule, and ask the way to *Sion* with their faces thitherward.

Holy souls are such in whom God has made good that promise, *Ezek.* xxxvi. 26, 27. *A new heart*

heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. Hereupon, they are Men of another Spirit, and with Caleb and Joshua, follow God fully, whilst others do it only in pretence, and the most turn their backs upon him.

(3.) Grace distinguishes those in whom it is, from their former selves. They who were once darkness, are now made light in the Lord; and hereupon judge of things in a very different manner from what they did before, and in some measure act accordingly. Sin that they once made light of, and too much delighted in, they now see to be the greatest evil, and groan under it as their burden. Christ, that in their account was without form or comeliness to engage their eye, and had no beauty to attract their desire, is now the chiefest of ten thousand, yea altogether lovely to them.

They could once contentedly live without God, and said unto the Almighty, depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways; but now they are sensible, they have more to do with him than all the world, and their language is, Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. The world was once to them instead of God, and they placed and pursued their happiness in it: but now they look upon it all, as vain and vanishing, and deprecate nothing more than be-

ing put off with it. Lord, say they, deliver me from the men of the world, who have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure.

Religion, while untried, was censured as a mournful, grievous, unprofitable thing; and so was treated as a *by-matter*, if a profession was taken up at all: but now the soul, as sanctified, makes it its business, and finds it its delight; studies God's will, in order to do it, and is never better pleased than when thus employed; esteeming his commandments concerning all things to be right, as having experienced, that in keeping of them there is a great reward.

Death and judgment, heaven and hell, that seldom came into the man's mind while unrenewed, are now seldom out of it, and lie with a peculiar weight there, as matters of the last moment, and that to himself: so that he looks upon all the dying concerns of time, as inconsiderable in comparison of eternity. And under this view, he is working out his salvation with fear and trembling; giving all diligence to make his calling and election sure, as one that is waiting for his Lord, and that would be found of him in peace; and when he is here no more to live, to be happy with him for ever.

In a word, where grace is communicated, the man is throughout changed, as to temper and course, heart and life.

Thus grace makes a difference which speaks its excellency.

4. The value of grace may be gathered from
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the price that went to purchase it, which was no less than the blood of Christ. This was necessary to make atonement for sin, and satisfaction to God, and so for our freedom from condemnation and deliverance from the wrath to come, by pardon and justification; and also for our being healed and recovered to the image of God, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost: both which are necessary to our salvation. Our happiness lies in being reconciled to, and made like God: and as including both these, Christ suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to him.

By nature we are children of wrath; not only as doomed to it, but prepared for it. And a change is necessary in our constitution, as well as relation: and to bring about this, we are not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from our vain conversation, &c. but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot, 1 *Pet.* i. 18, 19. By our primitive apostacy from God, grace is blotted out and quenched *within*, and the Spirit of grace forfeited and sent away grieved; and it was part of the curse of the broken law, that from thence forward we should be left by him, as souls on which he would no more work, and in which he would no more dwell: And had not Christ died a propitiation for sin, no such jewel as grace had been found in any heart. It was Christ's redeeming us from the curse of the law that opened a way to the returning of this again. Justly then may that be

called precious, of which the price is the blood of the Son of God.

5. It is precious in regard of its Author, *viz.* the Spirit of God : hence it is called the *Spirit of grace*. Under this character he is promised where a saving change is designed, *Zech. xii. 10.* And it is wrought by his agency, wherever it is wrought. The instrument he ordinarily makes use of, is the word : but all the influence it hath, and the saving impression it makes, is from him. The letter is dead, and would leave us so : it is the Spirit that quickeneth, *John vi. 63.* He can do this without means : but whatever means he employs and requires our attendance upon, the divine life inspired is nevertheless his own work. Hence to be born again, and to be born of the Spirit, is all one. We are saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, shed on us through Jesus Christ our Lord. If the excellency of the author derives a value to any thing ; grace is the product of the Holy Spirit, the best and highest one.

6. It is precious in its *Nature*. *Adam*, fallen, begat a son in his own likeness, *i. e.* carnal and corrupt, as he had made himself by sin : for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean ? But as sinners, descending from a degenerate head, are corrupt, and bear the image of *the earthy* ; so saints, as the workmanship of the Holy Spirit, being throughout renewed, may be said to bear the image of *the heavenly*.

No

No two things can more widely differ, than the *old* man, and the *new*; the corruption propagated with the common nature by the first birth, and grace infused in regeneration. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, a mean, vile, ignoble thing: but that which is born of the Spirit, is *spirit*, something pure and refined, excellent and glorious, akin to heaven, and of a piece with it; hence called the divine nature, the image of God, and Christ formed within: something, upon the account of which, God is not ashamed to be called their God, nor Christ to call them brethren; as both he that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified, are all of one, *Heb. ii. 11.*

7. The excellency of grace is proved by its effects: particularly as,

It ennobles,
Enriches,
Secures, and
Comforts.

(1.) It ennobles.

Grace is a beam from the Father of lights, let into the soul, and leaving a divine impress there, making the children of the heavenly King all glorious within, and conformed to that world from whence they are born. Sin debases the humane nature, making men like the beasts that perish: but grace even begun, raises us to a dignity like that of angels; and when perfected, will fit us to be their associates for ever.

If the honour be valued that comes from God, how much are saints raised above other men?

As to *birth* : it is the top of earthly glory to spring from princes, and be of royal blood : but they that are renewed by grace, can look higher, as they are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. They are children of the Most High ; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

As to *temper* : whilst others are of the earth, *earthly*, and mind and favour earthly things, a gracious soul is aspiring upward to God and heaven, seeking for glory, honour and immortality, and cannot take up with any thing lower, than an incomprehensible crown, an everlasting kingdom. The church of God is represented by a woman clothed with the sun, and having the moon under her feet, *Rev. xii. 1.* trampling on that, on which others set their hearts. Being called to glory, whatever others do, they cannot allow themselves to center in the dust. They disvalue all that the world can do for them, in comparison of the favour of God, and communion with him ; and think nothing they can suffer in, or from the world, worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed : and thus chuse rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ; and esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than earthly treasures.

As to *office* : they are kings and priests unto God, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

As to *titles* expressive of their work and God's esteem of them : they are stiled his
jewels ;

jewels ; and however they are now scattered and obscured, the day is coming when he will make them up, and shew them in their brightest lustre. They are a royal diadem in God's hand, and such as he counts and calls his *glory*, *Isai. lxii. 3.*

As to *beauty* : They are made comely by God's comeliness put upon them ; and thus they are precious in his eyes, and honourable, and he is not ashamed to declare, he loves them.

As to their *life* and *course* : They *walk* with God, in holiness and righteousness before him, having their conversation in heaven, from whence they look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, with whom they hope to live and reign for ever.

In these and many other instances that are the effects of grace, it may be said to ennoble them.

(2.) It enriches. Mountains of gold cannot do this equally to the least degree of grace ; an heart principled with grace hath a treasure in it, valuable in itself, and making all those wiser and better in whom it is found. Other treasures respect only the body and the present world ; grace enriches the soul, makes rich towards God, and rich for eternity. Whatever else they enjoy who are destitute of grace, they are wretched, and poor, and miserable in the midst of all : But the gracious soul, how poor soever otherwise, has that which is more worth than all the treasures upon earth.

(3.) Grace guards or secures the happy persons in whom it is found.

1. Some-

1. Sometimes in a day of calamity in this world. When destruction is coming holy souls may be pleaded for, O destroy not the righteous with the wicked. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, provided on purpose for the righteous to run to and be safe; safe even under heaven, whilst God has any thing to do for them, or to do upon them.

2. However, they shall be safe in cases the most important, as at death, and at judgment, and so to eternity.

No child of God shall miscarry or be turned into hell. Grace shews those in whom it is, to have an interest in Christ, for whose sake, the wrath of God is turned away. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, and every gracious soul is so. The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself, from all that misery which ungodly sinners are liable to, and prepared for.

Holy souls have no enemy in heaven, nor any destructive vengeance armed against them from thence. The wicked shall be turned into hell: but this shall never be the portion of any that are born again. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection, on such the second death hath no power, *Revel. xx. 6.*

The vessels of wrath are fitted for destruction; and it is no wonder they are at last pludged into it: But they whom God hath made meet by grace to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, he will never send down with the workers of iniquity into outer darkness, where there is weeping and

wailing and gnashing of teeth. The everlasting fire is prepared for the devil and his angels; and none of the followers of the Lamb in the regeneration shall ever come into that place of torment. Whom Christ saves from sin here, he will also save from misery hereafter. This is so certain that the Apostle speaks of it sometimes as already done. All that are turned from idols to serve the living and true God, are waiting for his Son from heaven, even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come.

(4.) It is most reviving: All the springs of consolation are included in it, or connected with it; As it is the result of eternal love, As it flows from the blood of Jesus: as it is bestowed as a covenant blessing, and so shall never be taken away, but maintained, improved, and perfected, and so run into glory.

Grace is a right-hand favour, and so can never be given in anger. Other things may be the effects of God's common bounty and general providence, and so, may be given to those that are his enemies: But grace bestowed is a mark of distinguishing love, the favour that God beareth to his own.

A thousand privileges are connected with it, to feed their joy.

The subjects of grace, by being so, are freed from the power of corruption that fitted them for hell; and from the guilt of sin that bound them over to it. They are interested in their heavenly Father's care and peculiar regard: They have free access unto the throne of
grace,

grace, and the Spirit to help them to make known their requests: The promises are all theirs, from the one end of the Bible to the other; such as relate to the light of God's countenance, the protection of his providence, his presence in affliction, support under it, good by it, and deliverance out of it in the fittest season.

All the kind things God hath spoken, and caused to be recorded, are spoken to them, and recorded for them; and they are allowed to plead and live upon them, and fetch encouragement, peace and joy from them in all the turns of life.

They are entitled to the privileges of God's house; shall be welcome guests to the Lord's table; and there have their pardon sealed, and all the blessings of the covenant made over to them, and confirmed anew.

They are the objects of God's complacency and delight. Upon them his eye is always open for good: He will never leave them nor forsake them; but guide them by his counsel even unto death. And then they have a privilege more worth than all the world, *namely*, of committing their departing souls into the hands of their heavenly Father, by Jesus Christ their Blessed Redeemer.

Their hope in Christ is not confined to the present life, but runs over to a blessed eternity. Beyond the grave, they have an inheritance reserved for them, answerable to the relation into which grace hath brought them: But wherein the glory of that consists, we must stay
till

till possession, to be fully informed. *Beloved,* faith the Apostle to all made partakers of grace, *now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that when he (i. e. Christ) shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is : Like him in perfected holiness, and so dwell with him in everlasting glory.*

I have been longer than I designed upon this head, the excellency of grace ; and yet the one half has not been told you. My design in all, is to put you upon enquiring more closely than ever, whether it be found in you.

To assist you a little herein.

1. Grace, where bestowed, leads the soul to chuse God for his portion, and accordingly to place his happiness in him, in opposition to all things else. The *Psalmist's* language is expressive of the sense of every *gracious soul*, Whom have I in heaven but thee ? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. No sooner is the heart touched and changed, but it turns from the creature, as nothing, to God as all.

To thee my God I look, to thee I come : I come to thee alone. No creature in the world gave me my being ; none of them redeemed me when lost ; none of them can pardon my sin, justify me at thy bar, save me from thy wrath, renew me, and be a felicitating portion to my soul. My displaced soul can never be well till it come near to thee. To know thee and love thee, delight in thee and be beloved by thee, must be my blessedness ; or I can never have
I any.

any. Let others take up with what they will, the Lord is my portion, faith my soul; and O let me never have any other. My heart is no longer what it was: it stands pointed to thee, followeth hard after thee, and is resolved to take up with nothing lower; but must remain restless and unsatisfied for ever, if thou be not its rest and joy.

2. To every soul where grace is found, Christ is precious; by whom grace is purchased, and through whom it is bestowed.

How is it with you?

Is Christ dear to you, and prized by you? Are you daily studying of him, and labouring above all things in the world to make sure of, and clear up your interest in him, as that which is infinitely more necessary and valuable than any thing else in the world? Are you filled with admiring thoughts of his person and excellencies: Are you affected with his condescension and grace in his laying down his life to save sinners? Do you live under the powerful conviction, that without him you are lost, but in him you are happy for ever? Do you think no pains too great to reach this? Nothing too dear to deny yourself in, or to be parted with that would keep you from him, or deprive you of your interest in him? Is no condition more dreadful to you than a christless one? And so Christ be yours, would it in your account, make amends for all that you can want, or suffer?

3. A soul principled with grace hates sin? and from that hatred, prays and watches, and
strives

strives against it, and will never be at rest till perfectly free, *that is*, till removed from earth to heaven, where nothing that defileth can ever enter.

4. Gracious souls have their hearts and hopes drawn off from this world, as their portion, and resolve never to seek their rest or take up their happiness in it. They look to heaven as their home, and the enjoyment of God there as their chief felicity. Their hearts are in heaven where their Lord is: Their faces stand *Zion-ward*. Heaven is the center of their hopes, the object of their pursuits, and the thoughts, the views, and discourses of heaven are their frequent refreshment upon their way through this world; and the possession of it, is that which they expect to be their perfect everlasting happiness; and in this hope, they are purifying themselves, even as Christ their head and example is pure.

APPLICATION.

1. Is grace so valuable? How blind are they that see not its worth? What enemies to their souls are they who labour not after it?

2. How much hath God done for them on whom he has bestowed his grace, so excellent in itself, and leading to glory?

3. How greatly are the Partakers of grace obliged to Christ, by whose blood it is purchased, and for whose sake it is bestowed?

4. How glad should they be of all the opportunities to meet him, by his presence and influence, to have grace drawn into act?

5. How

5. How thankful should they be, who can say with the church, *While the King sat at his table, my spikenard sent forth the smell thereof?*

Lastly, How willing should they be whose grace hath been drawn forth by the presence of Christ here, to behold him in his glory, and dwell with him for ever. Though death stand in the way, say with good old *Simon*, *Now let thy servant depart in peace.* To have had communion with Christ here, has been heaven begun: But, Angels, do your office, in bearing my departing soul to be with Christ there, as that which is far better.

S E R M O N IX.

C A N T. II. 16.

My Beloved is mine, and I am his.

THIS book is a song of love, and these are some of the sweetest expressions in it.

They are the revived and cheared church's triumph in Christ by an appropriating faith, under the sense she had of the happiness of having a special interest in him, after the remembrance of the deep distress she had been in for want of it, at first in her natural unconverted state, and after it when she had fallen into a deserted one for a time.

The spouse, here representing the church, and every true believer in it, recounts the alluring manner in which Christ prevalently drew her to him. Ver. 10. *My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.*

My Beloved spake: How affecting is it to remember the merciful voice, that called me from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from wrath to salvation? My beloved spake when none could speak peace, or give ease and rest, but he: and how endearing was the sense of his

love thus seasonably discovered, and what an excitement was it of love to him?

He spake and called, *even unto me*, how mean and vile, sinful and unworthy soever, and as low as I was sunk in my own account, or as to any other help, saying, *Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.*

This is the gracious invitation Christ is represented as making, and which he goes on to back with the most powerful arguments. Ver. 11. *For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over, and gone*, i. e. The face of heaven is cleared up, and the storm of wrath that was ready to be poured down from thence, diverted: I have satisfied justice, made peace by the blood of the cross, and am sent to speak it to them that are afar off, and to them that are nigh: The black clouds charged with vengeance, are rolled away. And now, behold *The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land*, ver. 12. *The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs*, &c. (ver. 13.) i. e. All the signs of a grateful season appear, and the good will of heaven is proclaimed towards men: Truth springs out of the earth, and righteousness looks down with a pleasing aspect from above: The joyful sound is heard, that God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, who as most willing to save, repeats his affectionate call to sinners to come unto him for that end, *Arise my love, my fair one, and come away*, ver. 13.

How hard is it to bring over a soul to Christ! How astonishing his kindness and
grace

grace so long to endeavour it ! For he still goes on, *O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs*, whither sense of sin and fear of wrath have driven thee, *let me see thy countenance*, &c. Look unto me, and be saved : Why shouldst thou distrust the merit of my blood, or my willingness to give thee an interest in it ? Have I done and suffered so much to deliver thee from hell and endless misery, and purchase everlasting life and glory, which I freely offer thee together with myself ; and wilt thou after all, question my love or deny me thine ?

What could I have done more to assure thee of the truth and strength of my love ? Read over the story of my bitter passion and bloody death, and see at what a rate I have valued thy salvation, and how earnestly I have sought it ; and now, *let me hear thy voice*, not of desponding complaint, but of hearty compliance, yielding to my call and claim. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, to seek and to save that which is lost : and if thou wilt be mine to this end, Lo, I am thine for ever.

And the believing soul being at last brought to consent to this, it makes way for the triumphant conclusion in the text, " Lord, as thou invitest me, I come to thee ; as thou offerest thyself, I heartily accept and close with thee : " *My beloved is mine, and I am his.*"

Having thus given you the sense of these words from their dependance, several *observations* may be made from them : As,

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the *Beloved* of every believing soul.

Though they differ in the value they set on other things, they all agree to give Him the pre-eminence. He is *fairer than the children of men*, Psalm xlv. 2. And nothing upon earth hath so large a room in their affections. He is transcendently lovely in himself, and so in their esteem. To them that believe he is precious, 1 *Pet.* ii. 7. On him their hearts are fixt: and to call them off to any created excellency, is to invite them to despise the sun, and to admire a glow-worm.

The Apostle speaks the sense of all believers with respect to Christ, yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, &c. I do so to be kept without him, and judge them well parted with to be found in him, *Phil.* iii. 8. My Beloved is he, I am most pleased with, saith the believer.

2. The knowledge of a special interest in Christ is attainable: *My beloved is mine.*

Here you may observe, That ardent love makes way for joyful assurances, and how little they are like to reach it, who indulge a cold indifferent temper and spirit.

3. The mutual endeared relation between Christ and believers, is a ground of highest thankfulness and joy.

What can be wanting to their felicity on earth in the way to heaven, who can say of him in whom all fulness dwells, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his?*

In speaking to this third observation, I shall briefly shew,

I. What

- I. What are the grounds of the Relation between Christ and believers, on which he is *theirs*, and they *his*.
- II. What Relations are built on those grounds, on *Christ's* Part, and on *theirs*.
- III. The ends of both, or *for* what he is *theirs* and they are *his*.
- IV. The *Use*.

I. What are the grounds of the relation between Christ and believers, on which he is *theirs*, and they *his*.

As to Christ, He is *theirs*,

1. By the solemn call and appointment of the Father, and that from everlasting, 1 *Pet.* i. 20. *Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*

God early foresaw, how soon man would destroy himself, and, from his meer compassion, early provided for his recovery.

He found a ransom in his own bosom, whereby we might be delivered from going down into the pit, his son, and thus speaks of him, *Isa.* xlii. 1. *Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.* Ver. 6. *I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles.* Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.* He declares he was set up from everlasting; and came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him.

Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, and had a body prepared him, and power to lay down his life and take it again, and this by commandment from the Father: For him hath God the Father sealed, and authorized as the captain of our salvation to bring many sons unto glory; and being to be made perfect through suffering, he was to assume our nature in order to it: Whence, both he that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified, are all of one.

2. Christ is *theirs*, by his free and voluntary undertaking of their effectual recovery. No sooner is he called of the Father, but he readily consents, *Isa. l. 5. The Lord hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.* So far from that was he, that he proclaims it cheerfully, *Lo, I come to do thy will, O God*; though that will was, for him to lay down his life, this he did of himself, pouring out his soul unto death.

He declared his early satisfaction in the prospect of accomplishing his office in the fulness of time; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. And when he appeared in the world, he esteemed and spake of it as his meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work. though he was in the form of God and equal with him, he freely made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, to fulfil the design of love, and obtain eternal redemption for his people.

3. Hereupon, he is *theirs*, as having a constant regard to them in what he did and underwent, pursuant to his undertaking. For their sakes he sanctified himself, that they might be sanctified through the truth. He carried them upon his heart in all that he did and suffered; and the benefits of his death shall infallibly be extended to them. His people shall be willing in the day of his power: He shall see his seed, the travel of his soul, and be satisfied, and have no reason to complain that he hath laboured in vain, or spent his strength for nought.

He became the Son of Man to raise them to the dignity and relation of the sons of God; and was made a curse, that the blessing of *Abraham* might come upon them that believe. He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification; and being taken from prison and from judgment, who shall declare his generation? At his ascension, he assures his disciples he went to prepare a place for them. For *them*, he ever liveth to make intercession, and when he shall return to judgment, he will come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. He loved his church, and gave himself for it: Which the Apostle applying to himself, speaks what every believer may apply, even this, *He loved me, and gave himself for me.*

4. *Lastly*, Christ is *theirs* by his own consent and engagement. He thus bespeaks them in the language of love, *Hof. iii. 3.* Thou shalt

be for me, and not for another, so will I also be for thee.

Though thou hast dealt unkindly with me, and cast me off; yet will I not do so by thee: Though thou hast set light by me, and all the purchase of my blood; yet both I, and all that I have are thine. There is nothing thou canst want, but what I am able to supply; nothing thou canst desire but I am ready to give, and whoever else fails thee, I will be thine for ever.

These are the grounds of the relation on Christ's part, to which there is something correspondent on theirs. As they have a special interest in Christ, so he has a special claim to them: And this,

1. By the Father's gift. Of this Christ speaks, *John xvii. 6. I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were and thou gavest them me.* They are given him from eternity by the covenant of redemption, and in time by effectual vocation: They are so, as his charge, and as his reward.

As his charge; to be ransomed by his blood, healed by his grace, and brought at last to endless glory.

And they are given him also as his reward, the fruit of his meritorious obedience and death, to serve him in this world, and when ready, to be with him in a better. Accordingly, as going to heaven, this is his prayer for them, *Father, I will that they also whom thou*
hast

hast given me, be with me where I am, John xvii. 24. And it is his exprefs promise to them, *If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be.*

2. They are *his*, as bought with the price of his blood ; being redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot, 1 Pet. i. 19.

3. They are *his* by conquest. The elect, by nature, are children of wrath, even as others ; dead in trespasses and sins ; walking after the course this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience. And, it is by a powerful rescue, that they become the Lord's.

He opens sinners eyes to discern their danger, and awakens their consciences to feel in some sort their misery, that they may be no longer in love with it. He binds the strong man armed, and casts him out ; makes his way to the heart, through opposing corruption, and so regains the throne that is only his own due.

Whereupon,

4. And *lastly*, They become *his* by voluntary surrender. They are won by his kindness, melted by his grace, drawn with the cords of love, and so run after him. They see the strongest reason, the sweetest encouragement, the greatest advantage to do so ; and being made willing in the day of his power, say with the church, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his.*

This brings us to consider,

II. The

II. The mutual endeared Relations consequent hereupon.

These I need only mention.

Christ becomes their friend, and owns them under that character, *John xv. 15. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.* They pass into the relation of his brethren, among whom he is the first-born. They are owned for his sake by the same Father: to as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name: and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. He becomes their head and husband, and they his spouse, and his members, the objects of his most endeared affection, constant care, and peculiar delight.

In a word, He is their all-sufficient Redeemer and Saviour, and they his ransomed, saved ones. Their salvation is begun in grace, and the day is fixed in which it is to be perfected in glory.

Hence I proceed to the

III. Thing, To consider the ends of the relation on Christ's part, and on theirs, what it implies on either side for any to say, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his.*

In point of privilege. As to believers,

I. Christ is *theirs*, to answer all the demands of justice, and screen them from wrath. There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,

Jesus, in whom they have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. They shall not sink into perdition. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather is risen again: and as he was delivered for our offences, so he was raised again for our justification, bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, and so made peace by the blood of his cross. How effectual hereupon, is his plea with the Father, in behalf of every one receiving the atonement, and coming unto God by him, If he has wronged thee, or owest thee ought, put it all upon my account. How comfortable is it to say, with a view to this, *My Beloved is mine?*

What, O my soul, is the cause of all my trouble, but sin? What fears and horrors have I often felt, lest it should never be pardoned? What killing apprehensions of the wrath I was liable to, the imminent danger I was in, having no assurance of life, and knowing sudden death would have sent me quick to hell? O the wearisome days and restless nights I endured upon that account! But now, my fears may be turned into songs of triumph; my Beloved is mine, to procure my discharge, and blot out all my scores: my offences are many, but his satisfaction is full: my sins heinous, but he hath made his soul an offering for sin, and in him the Father is well pleased. I deserved to be cast into the prison of hell; but he became a ransom, that I may be delivered. *This is my Beloved, this is my friend:* how infinite are my obligations to him!

2. He is *theirs*, to rescue them from the power and reign of sin, and the tyranny of Satan, and keep them from *falling back*. The Spirit of life from Christ Jesus, frees his members from the law of sin and death; and they shall be no more led captive by Satan at his will; for they whom the Son makes free, are free indeed.

3. He is *theirs*, to bind up their wounded spirits, and speak peace to their troubled souls. This is express in his kind invitation, *Matth. xi. 28. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

He knows how to have compassion on such as are ready to faint, conveys secret cordials to the hearts of his servants; and though in the world they shall have tribulation, it is enough to sweeten all, that in him they shall have peace. With what a lively sense of his compassion and grace, may the once mourning christian say, *My Beloved is mine.*

How often has he found me in secret almost overwhelmed with grief, and wiped my eyes, and calmed my soul; eased my conscience, and silenced all my doubts and fears, and in the multitude of my thoughts within me, bid me, *Be of good cheer; my grace is sufficient for thee?*

O the sweetness of the special relation to Christ! Who would live one day without it? or be at a loss for an answer to the enquiry, *What is thy Beloved more than another Beloved?*

4. He is *theirs*, to restore them to the favour of God, and maintain them in it. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,
through

through Jesus Christ our Lord : through whom we have access into this grace wherein we stand, *Rom. v. 1, 2.*

5. He is *theirs*, to hear and answer their prayers, and supply all their wants.

How wretched and destitute soever be our case ; tho' we may be poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked, he hath gold tried in the fire to enrich, white raiment to clothe and adorn, and eye-salve to enlighten and ease. In him, it hath pleased the Father all fulness should dwell ; that of his fulness, his members may all receive, and grace for grace.

6. *Lastly*, He is *theirs*, to over-rule all things for their good, guide them by his counsel even unto death, and afterwards receive them to glory.

For this, he hath all power in heaven and earth, and compassion enough to employ it ; so that none of his charge shall ever perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. He is able to keep them from falling, and will not fail to do so, till he present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. How great is the happiness of the true believer, who can say, *My Beloved is mine*, to such purposes as these !

But he is not to stop here : having said, *My Beloved is mine*, he is moreover to add, *and I am his*. And thus the believer is *Christ's*.

1. Humbly to listen to, and learn of him, what he is to know, believe and do, in order to salvation. The command is express, *Mark ix. 7. This is my beloved Son, hear him.*

This,

This, O my soul, is he that lay from eternity in the bosom of his Father, a teacher come from God to shew us the way, and lead us back to him. Never man spake as he spake; and tho' I was once disobedient, no longer would I be so. My ear, my heart shall be open to him. If he tell me of the cross, I would not go back: if he utter high and transcendent mysteries, I would receive them upon his testimony, as truth itself, and not proudly ask, How can these things be? I do not expect to be personally taught by him, as was the privilege of his disciples whilst he was upon earth; but as the gospel is *his*, I would chiefly regard him by my attendance on those he sends. O that I may hear the voice of my Beloved speaking in his word, and feel the enlightening, warming influences of his Spirit! His doctrine descends as the rain, and his speech distils as the dew, his words flow like honey, and are far more sweet to the taste.

Thus the believing soul delights to sit at Christ's feet, and to any motion of leaving him, or going away, answers with *Peter*, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

2. They are *his*, to obey and please him, as the end for which they were redeemed by him. Having received Christ Jesus the Lord, they are practically to own his authority, by doing the things that he enjoins. Hence, this is the believer's language, *To me to live, is Christ*. My life is devoted to his service, and shall be spent in it. His will would I regard, as the rule of my

my actions, and make his glory the scope of my desires and aims. To this I am constrained by his dying love, being not my own, but bought with a price; and therefore, am to glorify him with my soul and body, which are his.

3. They are *his*, intirely to depend upon him for all that they need or hope for, as to this world or another, *Isaiab* xlv. 24, 25. *Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, &c. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*

Lord, how miserable shall I be, if thus I am not thine? Being laden with guilt, and wounded in spirit, I have none else to whom to go: being liable to justice, and the divine displeasure; afraid, and in danger of everlasting burnings, I betake myself to thee, my only refuge. Thy blood alone can wash away all my sins, and answer all the demands of justice: thy righteousness alone can cover all my spots, and give me acceptance in the sight of God: thy merit is all that I have to plead, to be delivered from the wrath to come, and obtain salvation with eternal glory. I expect no mercy, but for thy sake, as the purchase and fruit of thy obedience and sufferings. I therefore commit my sinful sinking soul unto thee: I cast my everlasting hope upon thee, to form me for thy praise, fit me for thy service, and bring me at last to thy kingdom and glory. Lord, save me, I am *thine*.

4. Having thus given themselves up to be the Lord's, they are *his*, faithfully to employ what-

ever talents they have received from him, as those that must be accountable to him.

Though my blessed Lord be gone to heaven, it is to receive a kingdom, and return. In the mean time, he has set me to work for him below; and if any wonder, a believer so constantly, so delightfully labours, whether present or absent, to be accepted of him, his answer is ready, It is as waiting for my lord, whose I am, and whom I am bound to serve.

5. They are *his*, to fight under him as the captain of their salvation against all that oppose his saving design. The Redeemer must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet; and if he puts the question, *Who is on my side?* This is the answer of every sincere believer, *Lord, I am thine.*

I would have the same friends and enemies with thee, the same objects of love and hatred. In thy strength, would I mortify indwelling corruption, resist surrounding temptations, tread down an evil world, and make my way thorough it: patiently waiting, till by dying I overcome, and enter into that state, where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.

6. *Lastly*, They are *his*, to love and delight in him whilst they live, and earnestly long to see and be with him above. Who can say, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his, and not have his heart enflamed with love to him*, seeing he is altogether lovely? And which way should love work, but in desires after him? And where can

those desires be filled up, but in his presence, and when with him in glory.

As therefore he proclaims from heaven, *Behold I come quickly*, well may *the Spirit, and the Bride*, or the Spirit in the Bride, say, *Come*, make haste my Beloved, and come away; and every particular saint say, *Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

APPLICATION.

And now, as the *Use* of all,

1. How wonderful is the grace of God in the method of salvation by Jesus Christ! That the eternal Son of God should not only be given for us, but given to us! That we should be ransomed by him, as dying in our room and stead; brought into the nearest union to him, as our recovering head, and that any of us, children of wrath, should be admitted to say of the Lord of glory, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his!*

2. From the mutual endeared relation between Christ and believers, Let it be remembered, that he observes what is done for and against any one of the number, and takes it as done to himself. They are *his*, so as that he rejoiceth and sympathizeth with them, in all their comforts and all their sufferings. They bear his image, are always under his eye, and near his heart. In all their afflictions, he is afflicted: he that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye: and as he pities them, he will not fail, in the fittest season, to send them relief; as *he is their Beloved, and they are his.*

3. As there is so intimate a relation between Christ and believers, we may hence infer the certainty of their perseverance. They that are once *his*, shall be always so. Having loved his own, he loved them to the end; and will keep them by a power not to be overcome through faith unto salvation.

4. This may confirm our faith as to the resurrection and future blessedness of them that sleep in Jesus. This, the spouse's triumph plainly includes, in her saying, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his*. The meaning is, I am intirely so; his, as to soul and body, time and eternity. And without this, how little would it signify to say, *My Beloved is mine*; for if in this life only we had hope in Christ, and our relation to him, and all our expectations from him were to end at death, we should be of all men the most miserable, 1 Cor. xv. 19. But his friends, when going to resign their souls, and lay down their bodies, may hear him speaking full to their comfort with reference to both, *Because I live, ye shall live also: of all that the Father hath given me, I will lose nothing, but raise it up at the last day*.

5. Who would not wish to be one of the happy number, who, with reference to Christ, can use the language of the text as his own, saying, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his*? Whilst you have no ground for this, how comfortless must you live, and how much more dreadful will it be to die? Who can think of leaving the world without horror, who has no interest in the only Saviour? But for the encouragement of
such

such as may have hitherto lived without him, you are to be assured in his name, he is yet willing to be *yours*, and ready, upon your coming in, to receive and own you for *his*. He waits for your consent, and would rejoice in it. And, as he came to seek and to save such as are lost, may every one that feels himself so, as being melted by his grace, say, Lord, if thou wilt pity and regard such an one as I, if thou wilt forgive, receive, and save me, I yield myself to thee, to be thine, thine only, and thine for ever.

6. *Lastly*, Having done this, let it be remembered, that the relation between Christ and every believer, is mutual. As soon as grace enables any one to say in truth, *I am his*, it is equally true, that *he is theirs*.

If we love him, it is because he loved us first; and therefore the spouse in another place, (*Chapter vi. 3.*) begins with her own consent, *I am my Beloved's*, and thence argues, *My Beloved is mine*. The same method I would direct the humble Christian to take, to get over his doubts and fears: say this night, say tomorrow, when commemorating your Redeemer's death and love, *Lord, I am thine*: I desire, I design, I consent, I resolve to be so: I call heaven and earth to witness to the declaration I make, the engagement I bring myself under, *I am my Beloved's*. And in this way, wait for his Spirit, to enable you to add, *My Beloved is mine*.

And, for your support in waiting, tell your souls, he has been known to others in breaking

of bread; why may he not be so to me? But duty is *ours*, comfort is *his*; and how long soever he hide his face from me, I would not think the worse of him. If he will have me go mourning to the gates of *Sion*, I would hold on after him, though with fear and trembling; I having some hope too, that I shall at last hear his reviving voice saying, *Come up hither*, the days of thy mourning are ended: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

S E R M O N X.

E Z E K. XLVII. II.

But the miry places thereof, and the marishes thereof, shall not be healed, they shall be given to salt.

IN this chapter we have an account of *Ezekiel's* vision of the waters of the sanctuary; by which the doctrine of Christ, attended with the gifts and precious influences of his Spirit, are commonly understood to be represented, the river that makes glad the city or church of our God, and which was prefigured and predicted to do so under these our *New Testament* times.

As to these waters, we may observe,

I. Their rise, ver. 1. They issued out from under the threshold of the house; signifying, that from Zion should go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, *Isaiah* ii. 3. There the Spirit was to be poured out upon the apostles of Christ, endowing them with the gift of tongues to preach the gospel to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, *Luke* xxiv. 47. In the temple they were to stand and preach the words

of this life, that is, of eternal life and salvation, as obtainable by poor sinners through Jesus Christ; and from thence to carry the glad tidings farther.

The waters issued from the temple: and as they are said to *come down from under the right side of the house, at the southside of the altar*. Some think reference is here had to Christ, who purchased the gospel, and all the blessings that accompany it, by offering up himself to die a sacrifice, and through whom they flow to us. From God, as the fountain, in and by Christ as the *channel*, they are conveyed to us.

2. We may observe their progress and increase. The waters went forth eastward; and *Ezekiel*, and his guide, followed them, and found them grown deeper and deeper as they went.

Having *measured a thousand cubits*, they went thorough the waters, and *they were to the ancles*, verse 3. *A thousand cubits* farther, wading through again, *they were to the knees*. Then walking a *thousand cubits* more, and crossing a third time, *they were to the loins*. After this, they walked a thousand cubits farther, and attempting to go over, the stream was found too deep to be forded: for *the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over*, verse 5.

This notes that the waters of the sanctuary, the gospel, and the grace wrought by it, are progressive and increasing. The gospel church was very small in its beginning, like a little purling brook; but by degrees it improved, as
the

the waters here did, many being added to it daily. The grace of the Spirit, where it is true, is growing.

And, from the prophet's following the stream, and frequently fording it, we may learn in like manner, that it is good for us to keep close to the waters of the sanctuary, to attend the gospel, and observe its progress and success; to be often searching into the things of God, and not take up with the surface, but endeavour, as far as we can, to go to the bottom.

Some things are plain and easy to be understood, as the waters that were but to the ankles: others require a deeper search, more pains and study to be intimately acquainted with them: as the waters to the knees or loins: but there are some quite beyond our reach, not to be fathomed or comprehended; which therefore we are to believe and humbly adore. In the scriptures, like as in these waters, there are some places such as a lamb may wade through; tho' there are others so deep that an elephant may swim in them.

3. We may observe, that these waters not only grew deep, but ran and spread far, verse 8. *These waters issue out towards the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea.* This was in part accomplished when the gospel was preached with success, throughout all the regions of *Judea and Samaria*, Acts viii. 1. and more fully since the joyful sounds going forth through all the earth, and reaching the ends of the world.

4. We may observe the different effect of these waters, as they are duly received, and have a free course, or are otherwise received.

1. Where they come, and are duly received, they *heal*, verses 8, 9. *which being brought forth into the sea, i. e. the dead sea of Sodom, the waters shall be healed, become sweet, useful and wholesome; and every thing shall live, whithersoever the rivers shall come.*

There is what answers to these waters in the gospel, and the grace that goes along with it. Such as are dead in trespasses and sins, are made alive by it, and of children of wrath, become the children of God. This is the great and happy change produced, where the gospel comes in its power, and obtains its end: dead sinners are quickened, and living souls made more lively, fruitful and flourishing.

2. But the places, or persons, that will not rightly receive, and so be healed by the waters of the sanctuary, but remain unchanged, are left under the most awful doom. This we have set before us in the words of the text, *But the miry places thereof, and the marishes thereof, shall not be healed, they shall be given to salt.*

By the *miry places and marishes*, understand sinners remaining unchanged under the gospel, refusing to be healed by the waters of the sanctuary; the means sent to that end; those that are so settled in the mire of sin, that they will not be healed, and think they have no need of healing.

That which makes a miry place, is the stop the water meets with, its not having a free passage,

passage, and mixing with the earth on which it lies: Upon which accounts, obstinate sinners under the gospel, are fitly compared to such places, as the truths they hear are stopt and not suffered to have a free course; as notwithstanding these, they retain their corruption, and under all their calls and helps to holiness, continue workers of iniquity. Where it is thus, the more plentiful the means of grace are that are vouchsafed, and, yet abused, the more vile they grow; like as miry places, that have much water poured upon them, become only the more so. And this being their case, it is said, *they shall not be healed*. The waters of the sanctuary that prove healing to others, shall not be so to them: They shall not be washed and cleansed, quickned and cured: *But shall be given to salt*, that is, bear no fruit, no more than ground sown with salt, which is the same with being doomed to perpetual barrenness, (*Deut. xxix. 23.*) and to be set up as a monument to season and instruct others.

In the words we may take notice,

1. Of the sinners spoken of, such as continue unchanged and barren under the gospel, as *miry places* and *marishes*, however washed, remain such still.

2. The doom they are liable to, *viz.* to have it said concerning them, *They shall not be healed, but be given to salt*, i. e. to remain unfruitful for ever.

Doct. *Such as continue in sin, and obstinate and unfruitful under the gospel, may provoke God to*

to give them up to the fearful judgment, not to be healed, but to remain unfruitful for ever.

He may say, Let him that is filthy, be filthy still : They are barren, notwithstanding all the methods and means used to work a cure ; henceforth, never fruit grow on them more.

Here the things I shall consider are,

- I. That the gospel has not the same healing saving effect on all where it comes.
- II. The great sin of those who continue unchanged and fruitless under it.
- III. The dreadfulnes of the judgment for God to say of any, They shall not be healed, but be left to perpetual barrenness.
- IV. The steps by which he usually proceeds to this.
- V. The *Use* to be made of these.

I. The gospel has not the same healing effect on all where it comes.

The waters of the sanctuary, upon some grounds spread the face of paradise, making them fruitful and flourishing : Others remain miry and marshy, barren and fruitless still, as unpleasant and unprofitable as ever. Under the ministration of the same word, some are saved, others perish. To some, through the power of divine grace, it proves the savour of life unto life : To others, from the prevalency of their own corruption, the savour of death unto death, 2 Cor. ii. 16. Some, like the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, bring forth herbs meet for him by whom they are dressed, and so receive blessing from him : Others bear no-

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thing but thorns and briars, and so are rejected, and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned, *Heb. vi. 7, 8.*

It is too sadly evident to need any proof, that the gospel has not the same healing saving effect on all where it comes. Nay, on the contrary, what reason is there to take up the prophet's complaint, and say, *Lord, who hath believed our report?*

Many that are advanced to heaven in respect of external advantages and means of grace, are likely after all to come short, and sink the lower into the place of torment; and may dread this, as they continue dark in the midst of light, dead under the means of life, enemies to God when he beseeches them to be reconciled, and in love with the present world, though he calls to unconceivably higher enjoyments in another.

It is supposed the gospel may be hid, and multitudes lost to whom it is preached, because so many shut their eyes, and harden their hearts against it, and continue doing so, till their day is over, and their opportunities lost, no more to be recalled for ever. And with what seriousness should every one of us put the question as we go along, *Am not I of that number?* Has the gospel come unto me, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, and effectually wrought to the turning me from vain idols to the living and true God? *1 Thes. i. 5.*

Thus it does in all that are saved: But O, to how many does it prove an empty sound, and who remain the same persons that they were before

before they heard it. They were dark and defiled, ignorant and unholy, lifeless and fruitless, and they are so still: They have had line upon line, precept upon precept, but all has been to no purpose. God has come seeking fruit, year after year, but has found none.

This leads to consider,

II. The great sin of continuing unfruitful, under the gospel, of our remaining in the same corrupt state in which it found us, and so receiving the grace of God in vain.

We cannot say the waters of the sanctuary have not reached us; but what the better are we for it, if we remain unhealed, miry and barren, lifeless and fruitless still?

This is a reproach to the gospel, and a grief of heart to those that labour in it.

I. A reproach to the gospel, as if it were a spiritless thing, without power or efficacy to produce what it was sent for. It has been represented as a revelation from heaven, and attended with a mighty influence to prepare men for it, and set them in the way to it: represented to be of God, as it tends to make men like him, healing their corrupt degenerate nature within, and guiding their feet into the way of holiness and peace; teaching them to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; laying up their treasure in heaven, and with the greatest vigour pressing towards it.

This the gospel, with the grace going along with it, has been represented as able to do, as an argument that it is of God: But, if we must
judge

judge of it, by such as remain barren and fruitless under it, how little excellent will it appear? How unable, or unapt to raise those that profess it above others, as to temper or life, when it may be said or shewn, that they that live under the gospel, hear so often its precepts, and profess to believe its promises and rewards, are yet no more holy, humble, self-denying and mortified to the world, than others; no more heavenly in their frame, and strict in their course; no more zealous for God, or just, or serviceable to men; no more active in doing good, or patient in suffering evil, than others? Nay, in many instances, with all their light of the gospel, they come short of some that were never acquainted with it. What a reproach does this cast upon it, and so on Christ its author, and the Holy Spirit that witnesses to it?

It is well that the gospel has better evidence of its power and excellency than unfruitful professors; otherwise, the divine original of it might be questioned, and the transcendent virtue and efficacy of it, decried. This is what barrenness tends to.

And 2. as it is a reproach to the gospel; so also a grief to those that labour in it. They whom God has sent into his vineyard, and employs in his gospel, if their hearts are upright with him, love to God and souls will teach them to value nothing like the fruits of their ministry. They have not the desire of their hearts, unless they see the effects of their labour, in the souls and lives of their people, in their fruitful profession of Christ, and constant growing up in him. This

is what they aim at ; the prospect of it yields them the greatest comfort and joy : And hence, on the contrary, the disappointment cannot but be very grievous. This sits heavy upon them, and makes them groan : Alas ! have I prayed and preached so long, to so little purpose.

After all their time, and pains, and earnestness shall they be left to sit down and say, One and another I have laboured over in vain, and so have spent my strength for nought ? Where are the children that I hoped would have been given me, and which I have been so long in travail for ? Shall they, that for holy fruitfulness, I had hoped would have been my joy and crown, be after all my reproach ? How deep do these thoughts pierce those who have occasion for them ! And where is the minister that hath not too much ?

What affliction does it cause upon their own account, from concern lest they should not have been upright with God, or lest they ran before they were sent, and lest they have been unfruitful, because unsuccessful ?

And besides this, they cannot but be concerned upon your account, lest they should be brought in as witnesses at last against their unfruitful hearers, and so increase their condemnation, whose salvation they so earnestly longed for, and laboured after. If God will not have the hearts of his people sadden, much less those of his ministers. And how great is their sin upon that account, and how much have they to answer for, who to so great a degree occasion it ?

1. Fruitfulness is what God justly expects and looks for ; and it is no small provocation to disappoint

appoint him herein. Where God vouchsafes means, he looks for answerable returns : as a husbandman would do from ground he hath bestowed much cost and pains upon. After his declaration of his concern about his *vineyard*, his planting it in a very fruitful hill ; his care in pruning, manuring, and doing every thing that tended to make it fruitful, what guilt must it argue in those who give him occasion to say, when I looked for grapes, behold it brought forth wild grapes, thus deceiving his expectation, and frustrating his labour ? And should all others do so, where would be the people he hath formed for himself, or the praise he hath formed them for ?

2. Unfruitfulness in such as sit under the gospel and the means of grace tends to bring all religion into suspicion, and to confirm atheists and infidels in the rejection of all. To hear men profess to believe the great things the gospel reveals to be true, and yet live no otherwise than if they were false, tempts to conclude their profession feigned, and so all religion to be a meer pretence.

3. Unfruitfulness under the gospel, is a sin against the clearest light, and the distinguishing goodness of God. God has told us in the plainest manner, what he requires of us, and expects from us : This we cannot but know ; and therefore to remain barren, is a sin against light and knowledge, and so of the deeper guilt : Especially, as with light to know our duty, we have means and helps in order to do it.

it. The Lord hath not been unto us a barren wilderness, or a land of drought, but the Father of mercies; and if we go not beyond others in fruitfulness, our sins will go beyond those of others in sinfulness; And by this we may be led to think of the wrath we lay ourselves open to.

To proceed to the next thing to be considered.

III. The greatness of the judgment for God to say of any, They shall not be healed, but be left to perpetual barrenness.

It is a spiritual judgment, which sorts of all others are the most dreadful, in regard of the soul, upon which they fall, and as they are instances of the greatest displeasure in God, by whom they are inflicted. How much horror is carried in this threatening, never to be healed, to be given to salt, to be perpetually barren! To be left in the state in which we were born, and the far worse into which we have brought ourselves by sin, and never be cured! To be deprived of the means of cure, or, not to have them blessed of God to do us good! That we should be forsaken and neglected as the high way; destitute of any thing that is good for the present, and without hope of any for the future! That ordinances shall be barren to us, and our hearts barren under them; that we would not be healed, and now shall not be healed till we die! That God should say of us, They would be filthy, and let them be filthy still! They were wilfully barren, and now, in judgment as a punishment for their barren-

barrenness, they *shall* remain so ! My gospel shall not instruct and heal them ; my Spirit shall not, to any saving purpose, any more strive with them !

1. A soul not healed, or totally barren, is yet out of Christ : And, to be doomed to perpetual barrenness never to be healed, is for ever to be excluded from him. And, what more fearful can be said of a soul, than that it is out of Christ, and must be for ever so ? Out of Christ, and so unpardoned, unsanctified, without hope of heaven, under sentence to everlasting misery in hell, and its state as to this, never be changed ? If any thing could have healed it, the waters of the sanctuary would have done this, the gospel and the means of grace ; but remaining under these, and out-standing its time, the things of its peace, are now hid from its eyes.

The waters of the sanctuary shall never do the soul good that continues as a *wiry place*, till God resolve, it shall not be healed, but be barren for ever.

(1.) Either such souls shall be deprived of the means of healing, the external means of grace : Or,

(2.) They shall not be accompanied with the healing saving influences of the Spirit.

(1.) God sometimes may deprive them of the external means of grace, *Isa. v. 6. And I will lay it waste : it shall not be pruned, nor digged, &c.* God will not throw away his labour, and that of his ministers upon fruitless ground ; but either call them home, or

suffer them to be removed, that such may be left like the heath in the desert, *Jer. xvii. 6.* This is threatened, *Matth. xxi. 43.* *Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* And how deplorable is the state of the person or people from whom the gospel is removed, and so the glory departed; the means of salvation taken away, and the treaty of peace between God and such, broken off.

(2.) Or, if the gospel and external means of grace are vouchsafed to souls forsaken and never to be healed, They shall not be attended with the saving influences of the Spirit. To what purpose this, when the soul is never to be healed, the ground never likely to be made fruitful? God declares that his Spirit shall not always strive with man; and if the word and ordinances are continued, when the Spirit is withdrawn, instead of converting and healing, they will be but farther stupifying, *Isa. vi. 9, 10.*

2. A soul not healed, but given to perpetual barrenness, has no promise of the protection of providence, but may be exposed to all the evils of the present life. This God threatens his barren vineyard with, *Isa. v. 5, 6.* *I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up: and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be troden down, &c.* When the fence is taken away all manner of calamities have liberty to invade, even the most dreadful and desolating.

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Such as have been barren under the means of fruitfulness, have been the greatest instances of provoked justice.

3. And *Lastly*, They that are finally forsaken, as incurable and given up to perpetual barrenness, have not a moment's security from eternal wrath. *John xv. 2. Every branch in me, that beareth not fruit, he taketh away, i. e. is ready to do so: and all such as are withered, are prepared to be fuel for the fire, ver. 6.*

Whilst there is hope of fruit from any branch, it is spared: But when Christ comes to seek fruit, and finds none within the space allowed, and says, *Let not fruit grow on thee from henceforth, for ever*, it immediately withers: and so being no more for fruit, nothing remains, but that it be cut down and cast into the fire and burned. And O how terrible will that be! If he that despised *Moses's* law, died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath neglected so great salvation?

The IV. thing was to shew the steps by which such a judgment is brought on, and how God usually proceeds to it.

And here, let it be considered in general, that it is for sin, the sin of refusing to be healed after much patience, long waiting, plentiful provision and earnest intreaties in order thereto. It is because sinners will not be purged when God would purge them, that the resolve is taken, *Thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee, Ezek. xxiv. 13.*

God's willingness to heal sinners is sufficiently clear, in the physician he hath provided, remedy tendered, the time he waits, the entreaties he useth, the joy he manifests when any soul is recovered, and the grief he expresses when all the methods of his grace are frustrated. And if after all they will not be healed, how justly may he resolve, they shall not be healed, but continue barren for ever?

In the way to this sad state,

1. God leaves them to a careless indifferent spirit about what momentous things the gospel reveals, and the concern of their souls in them. They hear as if they heard not, not labouring to understand, and feel the weight of things that they hear. This they indulge, and therefore are left to it, *Isa. vi. 9, 10. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed.*

2. Such a carelessness and indifferency is usually attended with blindness and insensibility, so as not to apprehend their disease, and mind a cure, and perceive their need of it. They that in the day of their visitation will not know or regard the things of their peace, may have their darkness increased to a judicial blindness, and that may be accompanied with great stupidity; so that, though in the greatest danger, they may be most secure. This is called,

led, *the spirit of slumber*, which God gives to those who do not like to retain him in their knowledge, and *eyes that they should not see, nor ears that they should not hear*, Rom. xi. 8.

3. Sometimes the waters of the sanctuary are staid, or diverted; or else, they that would not be healed by them, are removed to places where they have none of the external means of knowledge and fruitfulness they once enjoyed.

4. The healing grace and influence of the Spirit may be withheld; without the help of which, the disease of the soul cannot be removed, nor its barrenness cured.

5. The spirit being withdrawn, they may be left of God to entertain errors and to believe lies; whereby they may think themselves whole, when ready to perish, and cry *peace, peace* to themselves, when sudden destruction is near, 2 *Thes.* ii. 11.

6. *Lastly*, Upon this, the resolution may be taken up to let them alone, that his Spirit shall not strive with them, that he will not seek to reclaim them, that they shall not be healed on earth: and at last, as unholy, they shall be excluded from heaven; and, as prepared for hell, they shall be cast into it, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

APPLICATION.

What remains is the *Use* of the whole.

Is it so dreadful a judgment for God to say of any under the gospel, They shall not be healed,

but be given to salt? Avoid those things that lead to this, and take the course necessary to prevent it.

First, Avoid those things that lead to this, which are such as these :

(1.) Making light of the waters of the sanctuary, by neglecting or careless attending upon them. Remember it is not a vain thing, for it is for your life.

(2.) Taking up with a meer profession of religion, and attending upon the means of grace without looking to see that their end be answered, in a saving change wrought within.

(3.) Neglecting, or opposing the convictions of conscience, and the motions of the Spirit.

(4.) Setting death and judgment at too great a distance, and flattering yourselves into stupidity from a vain presumption of having many years to come.

(5.) Delaying to look after a cure till another time.

(6.) Being too much taken up with the body and this present world, the cares of which choak the word, and cause it to become unfruitful.

Avoid these things as leading to so sad a state.

Secondly, Take the course necessary to prevent it.

1. Apprehend the dangerous case you are in by nature.

2. Attend

2. Attend upon the means God hath appointed in order to a cure.

Lastly, Be diligent in hearing, much in prayer, for the presence and influence of the Spirit, to heal, quicken and recover you to God, and bring you into a vital union to Christ : and then live by faith upon him for farther help and healing fruitfulness and growth in this world, preparatory to your compleat blessedness in another.

These are the things that belong to your peace. May you in this your day, know and mind them, that they may not be eternally hidden from your eyes.

S E R M O N XI.

MATTH. XV. 21--28.

Ver. 21. *Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*

Ver. 22. *And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.*

Ver. 23. *But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us.*

Ver. 24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

Ver. 25. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.*

Ver. 26. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the childrens bread, and cast it to dogs.*

Ver. 27. *And she said, Truth, Lord: Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.*

Ver. 28.

Ver. 28. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

IN the close of the foregoing chapter, we find our Lord in the land of *Genesareth*: where having reasoned with the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* that came from *Jerusalem*, and instructed the multitude, it is here in this chapter said, verse 21. *Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.* The persons and places that have been favoured with Christ's presence and instructions, may not be always so: having delivered his message, and done his work, he will remove. The day is going away, and night will succeed. Happy they, who while they have the light, know how to use it; and having Jesus with them, make sure of an interest in him, before he go from them.

Tyre and *Sidon* being cities of *Phenicia*, belonging to the *Gentiles*, it is questioned, whether our Lord actually went *into that country*, or into the *utmost borders of Palestine* nearest to it: for we read, he forbade his disciples to go into the way of the *Gentiles*, *Matth. x. 5.* Whence some apprehend, that he would not go himself thither; the time being not yet come for his being made manifest to them. Others think he withdrew thither for privacy sake, at this time, from those with him, and hearing him: but his going thither, with some of his miraculous *operations there*, might be taken as a *preludium* to the calling of the *Gentiles*, and to
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the clearer revelation of himself, that should be afterwards more generally vouchsafed to them.

But to whether of these the cause of his departure to the coasts spoken of, refers, we are concerned in what happened there, than to know this.

Ver. 22. *And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David: my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.*

In which we may take notice,

1. Of the *supplicant*, a woman of Canaan. The evangelist *Mark* says, she was a *Greek*, a term given to all the rest of the world who were not *Jews*, a *Syrophænician*, or native of the country near to *Tyre* and *Sidon*, one, it may be, of the race of the old *Canaanites*, and an *Heathen* compared to the *Jews*; and yet one applying to Christ, whom the *Jews* rejected.

2. Of the title she speaks to him by, *O Lord, thou son of David*, &c. As the true Messiah promised to the *Jews* of the seed of *David*, as the Lord and Saviour of his people, she here acknowledgeth him. She, as living near the *Jews* in *Galilee*, where Christ chiefly conversed, and preached, and wrought miracles, had an opportunity of hearing of him; and tho' an *Heathen*, she seems to be well enlightened in the import of the titles she here gives him, and brought to believe him the true *Messiah*, the desire of all nations, and the great deliverer of lost mankind: to him therefore she applies for help in her present need.

3. *The*

3. *The request*, she makes to him, with the ground thereof; *Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.* This was a common case in our Saviour's time: for as Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, the malicious spirit raged so much the more, and was permitted to do so, to advance the glory of the Redeemer in conquering and casting him out. The daughter was grievously vexed, in which affliction the tender parent deeply shared; and therefore in the language of love, spake of her child's distress as her own, *Lord have mercy upon me.* It touches and moves the bowels of gracious parents to see the misery their children fall under, or are hastening to; and this makes them the more earnest with Christ in prayer for them, as, it may be, they are not sensible of their own case, or cannot, or will not pray for themselves. They that desire their childrens salvation as their own, will, and ought to go to Christ as the great physician, and pour out their souls before him. *My child is sore vexed with a devil;* is led captive by him at his will, thrown sometimes into the fire, and sometimes into the water; hurried from one sin to another, and hasting apace to hell. O how it wounds my soul to think of the danger she is in! Lord, have mercy upon me, and help me by healing her.

Having thus seen the suppliant, and the occasion and errand of her coming to Christ: in the following verses we have an account how her faith was tried by Christ's carriage towards her, how it may be discovered in her waiting on him,
and

and in the issue, how it was commended and rewarded. And these shall be the heads to which I shall reduce what I design from this memorable passage.

I. The trials and difficulties this suppliant's faith met with.

II. How it was discovered in its trials, and worketh through all.

III. The happy issue of this, how gloriously it was rewarded; which will lead to the use we ought to make of it.

I. The trials and difficulties this suppliant's faith here met with.

These are several :

1. Though she cries, Christ is wholly silent, ver. 23. *He answered her not a word.*

The evangelist *Mark* tells us, Chap. vii. 24. that being come into the borders of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, *he entered into an house* : and hither she comes to him, and falls at his feet, with this humble cry, *Have mercy on me; O Lord.* But he takes no notice of her, answers her not a word.

How great a trial is this, to speak to the *only* Saviour, and have no return. To cry to a *merciful* Saviour, and meet with no more regard than if he did not hear ! In the deepest distress to have none else to go to, and yet to have no relief or answer from him who alone was able to help, and of whose compassions and grace she had heard so much.

From Christ's carriage here compared with the issue, it is plain, believers may have their prayers heard and accepted, and a gracious answer designed

signed them, when yet by the silence of heaven, they may be for a time kept in suspense.

This has often been the manner of God's dealing with his people, as we may learn from their complaints, and confessions how *hardly* they could bear up under their cases.

The church speaks of it as the bitterest ingredient in her cup, the greatest aggravation of her affliction, that no answer was given to the loudest cries she could send to heaven, *Lam. iii. 8. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.* And afterwards she complains that he barred the way of access to him, and thereby deprived of her most sensible support in distress, *Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through, ver. 44.* And with how mournful an air doth the spouse speak of her disappointment when seeking her Beloved, *Cant. v. 6. I sought him, but I could not find him: I called him, but he gave me no answer.* Psalm xxii. 2. *O my God, saith the Psalmist, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.* But God was still so: and this continued so long, that he declares, *Psalm lxix. 3. I am weary of my crying, my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.* And in this distressed case how earnestly doth he plead, *Psalm lxxvii. 7, 8, 9. Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?*

This is not a new, though a *difficult* case to a believer, considering the encouraging character under which God is made known to his people,

viz. as a God that heareth prayer, to whom all flesh should come, *Psal* lxxv. 2. Considering he has a perfect knowledge of what his people suffer: considering his great affection for them, the compassion of his nature, the power of his arm, or his ability to help them, and the many kind intimations he has given to expect it, *Psal* l. 15. *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.* *Isaiah* lxxv. 24. *It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.* After all this, how hard is the believer put to it, whose cries are entertained with silence, as if only poured into the air, to reconcile his treatment with God's goodness, &c. and to keep up faith in him? But, that faith is not unprovided of arguments to solve the difficulty, and carry the soul through it, we may shew afterwards.

Yet in the mean time the trial is fore, and was the case of the *woman* in the text. How humbly and earnestly doth she plead! She threw herself on the ground, and from the *dust* cried for help. Her case was most deplorable, *Lord, my daughter is sore vexed with a devil*: O let her be delivered from the *tyranny* of that *foul malicious spirit*, and no longer be subject to his power and rage. None besides him could do it, and to him it was the easiest thing in the world. She did not *claim*, but *beg*; begged it as an instance of *mercy*, and what she would esteem and acknowledge a mercy to *herself*, if she could be heard for this relief for her *child*.

Christ saw, and was witness to all her inward grief, the commotions of her soul, the troubling

of her bowels, as well as heard her cry : but for all this, *answered her not a word.*

This was the first trial, but not the only one ; a greater follows.

2. Upon the instances of the disciples concerning her, Christ seems to intimate, that he had nothing to do with her. It is said, *His disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

I cannot think as some, that the disciples spake this only out of impatience of her cry, and that they would have their Lord send her away *any how*, so they might be rid of her importunity.

Indeed their manner of speaking seems to intimate *too little* commiseration of her case, and that they spake for *themselves* and their *own* quiet, rather than for *her relief* ; this being the argument they used for *sending her away, even her crying after them.* But however, taking these words in the kindest sense, as the best plea they could make for her, *Send her away, for she crieth after us.* They might mean by them ; This is not a slight affliction she is under, nor is she cold in begging relief : her supplication is earnest and vehement, answerable to her pressing distress : O let her speedily obtain the mercy for which she loudly cries, and has so much reason to do so.

Admitting this, how much discouragement is there in the answer Christ gives ? How intirely does it seem to dash and cut off all hope, and leave her despairing ? If his silence was discouraging

raging before, his *answer* is much more so: if she was put hard to it when he said nothing, how much more so to hear him say, *I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel?* To which she not belonging, he seems to intimate, that she was without his commission, one with whom he had nothing to do, and who if miserable, must for all him, continue so.

Christ here speaks of his personal ministry and mission, which was the privilege of the circumcision or people of the *Jews*, *Rom. xv. 8*. He indeed came into the world, not for the *Jews* only, but for the *Gentiles* also: but, as an apostle, he was first to publish the gospel to them, and so were his disciples after him.

He does not deny that he was sent as a Redeemer to more; but that, as an apostle or minister in the days of his flesh, he was not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of *Israel*. The *Jews* were to have the first offer of gospel grace, and to them Christ came as his own, though they, his own, received him not.

This he here intimates, but in such a way as seems to leave the poor creature that cried after him, no prospect of relief.

He was *able* to *save*, and sent for that end; but it was to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*, of which number she was none, and so left to conclude herself without help or hope.

How amazing a thing was this! This poor soul was not only driven back by her own mis-giving thoughts, but even by Christ's words, *I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*.

But

But what Christ's commission was she did not stand to dispute, nor yield to scruples against her own necessity and duty. She was sure she needed his salvation as much as any : her distress was great, and so was his power and grace. God might do by his Christ what he pleased ; but this was only left her to do, to cry after him, and cast herself upon him, and never give over till she obtained her request. Upon this ground, after two repulses, *she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me,* ver. 25, which leads on to another difficulty : for,

3. When her request is renewed, Christ seems to answer it with reproach and contempt : ver. 26. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the childrens bread, and cast it to dogs.*

It was a common saying among the *Jews*, that themselves were the children of God, and all the rest of the world dogs : and Christ here speaks of, and to her, as one that was so reckoned.

How strange a word is this to drop from the mouth of Christ, the meek and merciful Saviour, one seemingly reproaching a poor creature as a dog when applying to him for help ? How low will God sometimes humble those whom he resolves to raise ?

Who would not have expected that now she should sink under the rebuke, and no more renew her suit, when even her importunity did but seem to drive her farther off from the favour she begged.

But that which seemed to cut off all hope, she now improves as a ground of claim : she owns the charge, and pleads from it. *Truth,*

Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table: as if she should say, The dogs belong to the family; and though they are not allowed to sit at the table, as children, they may yet creep under it: the feast is for the children, but there may be crumbs for the very dogs. In thy house there is bread enough, and to spare: whilst others are admitted to the fullest entertainment. I beg a crumb, which may be well spared even to a dog, and the children have never the less. But this leads to the

II. As having spoken of the trial of this woman's faith, I come to consider how it was discovered, and worked through all.

Christ speaks in the close of the text with admiration, *O woman, great is thy faith.* And it discovered itself to be so, in that though Christ was silent, she did not drop, but continue her suit: in that when he spake so as to seem to exclude her out of his commission for help, she passed over the doubts she could not answer, and instead of disputing, adored him, and prayed to him still: and in that, that by mentioning the low esteem the *Jews* had of her, and all like her, reckoning them but as *dogs*, she humbly let pass the indignity, and turned that which seemed most against her into a plea for obtaining the mercy she came begging to him for.

I. Tho' Christ was silent she did not drop, but continue her suit.

When Christ came into those coasts of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, he went into a private house, as not willing to have it known where he was: but she having notice of his being near to where she dwelt,

dwelt, searches after him, and having found the great Physician, might be ready to conclude, it was one half of the cure. But opening her case, and crying to him, *Have mercy upon me, O Lord, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.* Her expectation is disappointed: he gives her never a word, but rises up in silence, and goes away, as it were turning his back upon her and her request. Tho' she throws herself at his feet, begging for mercy; instead of relief, she can get no answer, but is first disregarded, and then left to stay, if she pleased, where she was: but she will not thus be put off. The eternal Word would not speak to her; the wisdom of the Father would not answer her; the compassionate Jesus would take no notice of her; the heavenly Physician would not yet help her: but all this does not discourage or sink her. If he leave the house, she will follow him: if her request, at its first delivery, be slighted, it shall be repeated with greater earnestness, and sent after him: *Send her away, for she crieth after us,* say the disciples of her.

How does the earnestness of this *Heathen* in crying after Christ, reproach the ignorance and ingratitude of the *Jews*, who generally made light of him; and invite all that hear it, to admire her faith thus discovered, and the grace of God in general wherever it works. Faith enabled her to read an argument Christ's silence, and by it she continued her suit. Though he answered her not a word, it is not said, he heard her not a word; and whilst the Lord's ear is open, the believer sees reason and encourage-

ment to pray. Christ's silence, to faith hath this language, *Pray on still*: tho' the petition is not presently granted, it may be received; and therefore should be presented.

It may seem strange indeed, that God, or Christ should be silent to the cries of their people, and sometimes long defer to answer; considering his titles and perfections, and the kind declarations of his word: but faith will teach the soul to fetch arguments, even for all this, to continue the suit.

God is a God *bearing prayer*, that *to him all flesh may come*: and his deferring to answer, is no proof that the request of any is not heard, or a reason that they should presently grow strange to him. His arm is not shortened that he cannot save, nor his ear heavy that he cannot hear; and if flesh and sense will thence say, *Why then am I not presently relieved?* Faith will say with more reason, *Why then should I not continue to cry and wait?* He knows the afflictions of his people, and hath a special affection for them; and faith assures the soul that he knows when it is best to appear in their favour. The trials of the present life are well enough consistent with our Father's love, and often the effects of it; and he hath ends worthy of himself in all his dealings with us, which if we know not *now*, we shall know after a while.

He hath said, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, &c.* But as he has not expressly limited the time, faith will tell us, that it shall be in the fittest season, of which
his

his own wisdom, as being infinite, is the best judge.

If his promise be urged, *Isaiah lxxv. 24. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer, and whilst they are yet speaking, I will hear.* Faith will teach us to understand he will do this at times when it may make most for his own glory, and his people's truest good, the great designs to which he has a constant regard.

To all which may be added, that the same words that bid us pray, bid us wait too, *Psalms xxvii. 14. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.* God will have his praying afflicted people to wait, and sometimes to wait long for an answer, and why should any one of them think to be peculiarly indulged? Thus he will exercise their faith and patience, make trial of their love, excite the more ardent desires and cries after him, in which he delights, and endear the mercy to us when he bestows that which we have been long praying and waiting for; and thus he will make way for the larger tribute of praise to be returned to himself. Under the seeming slight and silence of heaven, upon such grounds as these, faith still holds the soul to prayer; and the more it seems to be discouraged, the louder it cries.

Thus did the woman here: tho' Christ was silent to her first cry, she encouraged herself and pursued her suit and him: and how eminent was the faith she discovered!

2. When Christ speaks, and seems to exclude her out of his commission to give help and relief;

lief, she passeth over the doubt she could not answer, and instead of disputing, adores him, and prays to him still.

When he says, *I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.* How many scruples might arise in her mind, from Christ's saying, *I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,* about the extent of his commission, how far it reached, and whether she could expect to have any benefit at all from it? But she stays not to give place to these, but as it were getting ground by denials, she came and worshipped him, praying yet again to him, *Lord, help me.*

Two or three things are here implied, as what she kept her eye upon, and by which she was quickened and helped on in praying to Christ amidst so many discouragements, which otherwise would have been enough to sink her.

(1.) Upon her deep necessity. It was a deplorable case her child was in, being *grievously vexed with a devil*, from subjection to which she earnestly desired to see her set free.

(2.) Upon Christ's power, and his compassion joined with it, that he and he only could, and, as she hoped, would relieve her. Her faith as to this is manifested by her coming to him, and by the title she gives of him, of *Lord: Lord help me.*

She lived among those who would have gone to inchanters, and made use of exorcisers; but having heard of Christ, she would apply to no other. And she came to him as able to help, and of whose compassion and grace in helping so many instances had been given forth.

(3.) Upon

(3.) Upon him as the Messiah *promised of God*, the great deliverer; and so worshipped him, and cast herself upon him, with this strong cry, uttered by a stronger faith, *Lord, help me.*

3. When Christ seemed to reproach her by giving her an answer expressing the low esteem the *pharisaic Jews* had of her, and of all such as she was by nation, *viz.* That they were but as dogs in God's account, compared to them who were his children; she humbly let pass the indignity, and turned that which seemed to make most against her, into an argument for her obtaining the mercy she came to him to beg for.

This was a third repulse, which Christ here gave to this woman, in these words, *It is not meet to take the childrens meat, and to give it to dogs:* by which Christ designed to mind her of the low esteem the *Jews* had of her and her people without the visible church, compared with themselves. But she was willing to own herself to be as mean as the *Jews* reckoned her, and with patience overcame their diminishing comparison of her to a dog, and by faith improved it; meekly desiring, that if she was but even like one, she might have *a dog's place and privilege.* She did not reflect on others, to give honour to herself; denied not the *Jews* to be the children of God, nor herself to be as mean and vile as a dog: she owns all, and humbly replies, *Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.*

The *Gentiles*, intimates she, are poor worthless outcasts, and I am one of that number; yet some few of them at least may be allowed to

partake in a lower degree of what the *Jews* enjoy in the greatest plenty. The mercy I beg may be vouchsafed without prejudice to them. It is not the highest place, or the greatest favour I sue for, or can expect; only, if I am allowed but to be as a *dog*, let me not be wholly rejected or cast off. Though dogs may not come so high as the table, they may creep under it, and there eat of the crumbs that fall: it is but as a crumb to thee what I desire, and this I would be thankful for.

This was the discovery of this suppliant's faith under trials. Now followeth,

III. The happy issue of this, in her faith's triumph. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*

To how blessed an issue is the struggle brought? Christ's answer before, was not so discouraging, as this was comfortable. What consolation is it fitted to convey, as it is the testimony of one that knew the heart, and given after a manner most fit to revive it?

1. Her faith was owned, commended and admired by the *author* of it, whose words are always spoken according to truth, most clearly and certainly.

2. The reward of her faith was ample, as large as her desires were, to have it to be, *Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* How must her heart spring at such a word as this; giving her at once a concession of all her just desires, and an answer to all her prayers, both those expressed at this and all other times, as we may
humbly

humbly conceive Christ to mean by these extensively gracious words : And we may well suppose she had desired and prayed for deliverance from all evil, and the enjoyment of all good to its perfection in eternal salvation.

With what joy must she be filled, and every believer of the same strength of faith, who apprehends Christ, as it were, in particular speaking to him, *Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt?* And how fast and far will his thoughts and desires fly after good things ? What a compass will they take ?

Looking *downward*, he will say, I desire to be delivered from the bottomless pit, that my soul may not be gathered with sinners, nor my portion be with them in their place of torment : And Christ will say, *Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*

Looking *inward*, his language will be, O that I may be delivered from this body of death : The desire of my soul is to have sin mortified, and corruption at last utterly rooted out ; guilt pardoned, transgressions forgiven, fears and doubts thereupon scattered, in order to my walking more comfortably with God. And considering the state I am in, in a world lying in wickedness, full of dangers, and where the roaring lion continually goeth about seeking whom he may devour ; May I be the charge of a special providence, to be kept from making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience ; escape the wiles of the devil, and repel his darts, and at last be more than a conqueror through him that loved me. Well, to all this Christ saith, *Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*

Looking

Looking *upward* to the mansions of glory, the believer cries, O that heaven may be mine, and the Holy spirit dwell in me, in order to conduct me to it! May mine inheritance be among the saints in light, and my path like that of the just, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day! May I have as much of the light of God's countenance, the sense of his love, the consolation of his Spirit, as he shall see good for me in my present state, and always carry it as one that is waiting for a better.

May I be assisted in all my remaining work, supported under all my burdens, grow in grace as I do in years, know and love God better the longer I walk with him; and having been thus guided by his counsel even unto death, after it be received unto glory!

O the pleasure it must give the believing soul to have Christ say to all this, *Amen, Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*

APPLICATION.

I shall briefly apply this to you, introducing what I shall say by this word of *attention* used in the beginning of the text, *Behold.*

1. *Behold* a woman, an heathen so *gloriously* discovering her faith; and admire the change made by the grace of God wherever vouchsafed, and seek after it, and pray that you may be made partakers of it.

2. *Behold* a woman of *Canaan*, a believer, an *eminent* one; and considering her disadvantages, reflect with shame and sorrow, that multitudes within the church come short of her attainments.

3. *Behold* her in the struggles which she met with ; and learn thence, that great grace doth not exempt from great trials.

4. *Behold*, how comfortable an answer she had from Christ, after all the discouragements given her by him ; and believe there is more love in Christ's heart towards his people, than he may see fit presently to discover in his dealing with them. He objected to this *Canaanitish* woman, that she as one of that nation, was reputed as a dog by the *Jews* ; which was discouraging, before he came to speak thus encouragingly to her, *Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*

5. *Behold* this, and conclude, those shall never be *losers*, who in a sense of their misery, and Christ's ability to help, wait upon him and cry after him, let their cause be what it will.

Lastly, If Christ behold with pleasing wonder the strength of one grace in the souls of those who seek to him for help, with what delight will he view the perfection of every grace in such as are his people at the great day ; and how ravishing the encouragement will then be that he will give to every one of them ! He will say, *Be it unto thee*, (and in the fullest sense) *even as thou wilt ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

S E R M O N XII.

MATTH. XXII. 11, 12, 13.

And when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.

And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Then said the King to the servants, Bind him, hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

OUR blessed Lord had been instructing the people concerning *the kingdom of God* by parables, as you read in the foregoing chapter: And we find him continuing his discourse to them about the same subject and in the same way, in this. Ver. 1, 2. *And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like, &c.* It is the same kingdom with the *kingdom of God* mentioned in the foregoing chapter, ver. 43. which is now called *the kingdom of heaven* in this: By which is meant, the gracious form of government set up by God in this fallen rebellious world, for the salva-

salvation of lost mankind, and this in the last, clearest and most extensively kind administration or dispensation of it, predicted to take place under the *New Testament* times.

It may be called *the kingdom of heaven*, as it was contrived, and the whole plan of it laid and agreed upon in heaven ; as it was set up in heaven, and revealed in all its rich grace from thence ; as its nature, tendence and efficacy is to make such as become true subjects of it, heavenly and holy ; as those that enter into it, enter into the gate of heaven, and will have their consummation and reward as faithful subjects, in heaven itself, where this kingdom will receive its perfection ; and for such like reasons.

Our Lord in this parable or instructive similitude with which he compares this *kingdom*, sets it forth in many things relating to its original rise and constitution, and also to the carrying it on and compleating of it at last. He sets it forth in its supreme head and king ; in its mediator, chief minister and dispenser under him, by office, tho' not by nature ; in the rich and royal favours prepared for, and promised to those that will become subjects of this kingdom ; in the ambassadors sent to invite men at large to enter themselves subjects of it, and enjoy its privileges ; and in several other respects, as you may see by reading the parable.

By the *certain King which made a marriage for his son*, is set forth, the blessed God, as in the most astonishing manner, concerning himself about the recovery of fallen mankind to happiness.

By *his son*, is set forth the Lord Jesus Christ, the mediator of reconciliation between him and these fallen creatures.

By the *marriage*, or marriage-feast, (See *Luke xiv. 16, 17.* and *ver. 4* of this chapter) are set forth the unspeakable blessings purchased by Christ's blood, and now offered and ready to be bestowed, together with himself, on all that will receive them, and believe on him.

By the *call* or invitation to come to this feast, represented as once and again made to some who refused it, is set forth the obstinacy of the *Jews*, who made light of God's grace in Christ, and abused the messengers sent to call them to receive it: who for their ungrateful refusal of this gospel invitation, are predicted to bring upon themselves the most remarkable destruction, *ver. 5, 6, 7.* Afterwards, in the ninth and tenth verses, we have represented in this parable, God's order to call the Gentiles into his visible church and to be made partakers of his rich grace in Christ, and the ready execution of it, and with success. *Then saith he to his servants, &c. Go ye therefore into the high-ways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage: So those servants went out into the high-ways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.*

In this part of the parable contained in the text, we have it represented to us, That God will inspect and take a strict view of all that come into his visible church, and will discern as to every individual of them, who is a worthy
and

and well qualified member of it, and who is not, and will call to an account and punish the latter : *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.*

In which words we may take notice,

1. Of the king's narrow inspection of all that come into his church : *And when the king came in to see the guests.*

2. Of the discovery he made of one unqualified : *He saw a man that had not on a wedding garment.*

3. Of his questioning of him by soft and yet most reproving and convincing words : *Friend, (i. e. thou who pretends thyself such) how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment ?* Upon which, it is said, *he was speechless.*

4. Of the severe punishment he inflicted upon him : *Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness : There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

From the whole we may observe,

I. That God has a *feast*, a *marriage* feast for his Son, which he will have poor sinners invited to.

II. That he narrowly inspects and takes notice of all his guests.

III. That such as would come with acceptance, are to come with a *wedding garment* on.

IV. That God will assuredly find out, and discover every one that comes without it.

V. That

V. That finners shall be *speechless*, when God comes to deal with them.

VI. That the case is sad of such as shall be found by him, *without a wedding garment*; they being liable to the forest punishment: *Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

I. God has a *feast* to which he graciously invites us finners, and expects we should come to it.

This is to be understood of all the blessings and privileges of the gospel, the great things Christ hath purchased by his blood, and which the Father hath prepared, and declared his willingness to bestow, for his sake, on his believing members. It pleaseth him that in Christ all fulness should dwell; and of this fulness, by the agency of his Spirit in his word and ordinances, he is ready to communicate to us; supplying all our wants according to his riches in glory, by him.

This is foretold of the gospel-day, and promised in it, *Isa. xxv. 6. In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, &c. In this mountain, viz. mount Sion, denoting the church.* There God will make a feast for all people, for Gentiles as well as Jews; those of one kingdom and nation, as well as another; and for those of all conditions, ranks and degrees; ordering the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind to be invited, and such as are in the high-ways and
hedges

hedges to be compelled to come in, that his house may be filled, *Luke xiv. 13.*

The provision is sufficient, *Psalms xxxvi. 8.* *They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house: thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.* Wisdom hath killed her beasts, and mingled her wine, and furnished her table, *Prov. ix. 2.* The same language God hath ordered his servants to use: *Tell them which are bidden, behold I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things ready: come unto the marriage.* All the spiritual blessings promised in the gospel, and to be conveyed by its ordinances, are doubtless signified by the feast God has made, and invites us to; all the testimonies and tokens of God's greatness and love, royalty and bounty in and through the blood of his Son.

But it aptly agrees, and may be particularly applied to the sacramental supper in remembrance of Christ, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed; and to the partaking of which we are invited, whenever we are called to come to his table.

There we have the bread that came down from heaven; and giveth life to the world; of which, whosoever eateth, he shall never die: There we have the wine that maketh glad the heart of man; of which he that drinketh, shall live for ever. This is the feast God has made for his people of every sort, and to which he graciously invites, and would have them all come: and when the Redeemer, with and on whom they are to feed, bespeaks you in

the most endearing manner, *Eat, O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved, how can you stay away?*

Here I might shew,

1. How fitly this is called a feast :

2. And then, how fitly the feast of God.

1. As to the former, How fitly this is called a feast.

(1.) It is a feast for *plenty*, *Come, for all things are ready*, pardon and reconciliation, grace and strength, light and comfort. In our Father's house, and at his table, there is bread enough and to spare. None need, or ever did go away empty, through want or scarcity of provisions. It pleaseth the Father that in Christ all fulness should dwell. His riches are unsearchable, and here ready to be freely given out. How largely soever others have received from him, or are still receiving, there is enough nevertheless for any one of his members: And therefore with our largest desires we are bid to come: *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.* Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled, *Matth. v. 6.*

(2.) It is a feast for *variety*: One answering all desires, and suiting the various conditions and circumstances of all that are to come, elder and younger, those of every age and growth. Whatever christians want or would have, it is all here; all that is good and great, necessary and desirable, in the greatest variety, as well as plenty.

Here is pardon and forgiveness offered; and the pardon ready to be sealed, to free us from
the

the fear of hell ; and the promise of eternal life in the most solemn manner confirmed, to raise us to a lively hope of heaven. Here grace is ensured to fit us for it, and the Spirit to guide us to it, and comfort us by the way, and be the pledge and earnest of what we shall at last enjoy.

It is said of the *manna* that fell in the wilderness, that it suited every palate, and was agreeable to every constitution ; as containing the taste of what every one desired or longed for. Whether that was so or not, this is true of the feast God hath made at his table, and invites his children to. There is variety enough for christians of every sort : Strength and nourishment for the weak and languishing, comfort for the drooping, ease for the weary, a cure for the afflicted, help for the oppressed, and eternal life in the earnest and foretastes for such as are dying.

(3.) It is a feast for *excellency* and choiceness of *provision* ; no such in all the world, as this is. We have here the bread that came down from heaven, far exceeding the *manna* in the wilderness ; though that be called, for its delicacy, *angels food* ; and Wine that above any in the world, may be said to cheer and delight the heart.

O the delight and satisfaction holy souls have sometimes here experienced, when brought by Christ into his banquetting-house, and his banner over them was love ! Here they sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit hath been sweet unto their taste. And how dry, how insipid, have all the entertainments

of sense been, after one hour's fellowship and communion with God and Christ in such an ordinance, in comparison of it? O, how much better, and more desirous the satisfaction they have had at their Lord's table than could any where else in the world be expected. With what a holy transport do they think and say, It is good to be here! This is no other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven!

(4.) It is a feast for *the joy* with which it is, or ought to be attended in all such as come prepared.

For this, several things are proper grounds:
As,

[1.] It is a feast upon a sacrifice whereby our peace is made with God; and in token of it, a covenant of reconciliation and friendship is solemnly entered into between God and us through Jesus Christ. And, as a feast is made for laughter, what should be attended with joy and gladness, if not such a feast as this, instituted and held on purpose to shew, that though we have been enemies to God, he hath now reconciled us to himself; and as consenting to the terms of the covenant, admits us, as his friends, to sit and eat with him at his table? When peace and reconciliation is so solemnly professed and avowed, what joy should fill the souls of those that in a right manner, attend upon it, and know what it means?

[2.] It is a marriage-feast, which is not to be celebrated without expressions of joy. We here commemorate Christ's dying love, as lay-
ing

ing the foundation of the churches espousals to him, which is washed in his blood, to sanctify and cleanse it, that he may present it to himself a glorious church, &c. *Eph. v. 26, 27.* And believers solemnize their actual espousals to him, and confirm the agreement, saying every one for himself, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his*; and this as a pledge of the open and glorious solemnization of the marriage of themselves and the whole body of believers to Christ at the great day; for which, by his promise, they are encouraged to look, and should do so with joy.

[3.] It is a feast wherein we are to join with the best and most desireable company, God and Christ, and many of the children of their kingdom.

[4.] It is one to which we have a solemn invitation, and may be assured of the most gracious and hearty welcome when we come.

Thus it may be fitly called a feast.

2. 'Tis a feast of God; one which he designed and prepared for his people, and now invites them to, and entertains them at.

And it may well be stiled his:

(1.) As it is a feast for souls, which none but God can make. And it is a most suitable one, affording spiritual food for spiritual hunger and thirst.

(2.) As it is satisfying, so as to take off the soul from looking any where else, though it earnestly covets more of the advantage this way communicated. The believer no where finds that relief and comfort, as he doth here: and therefore in remembrance of the entertain-

ment he has had one time, would say when a new invitation is made to the same, Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee : my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth with joyful lips shall sing praise to God.

(3.) It is a feast that is the earnest of the life and blessedness of heaven, and which prepares them for it, and assures believers that they shall eat and drink with their Lord at his table in his kingdom.

So much for the first thing observed, God has a feast, a marriage-feast for his Son, which he will have poor sinners invited to.

II. He narrowly observes all his guests.

He observes who draw nigh him in sincerity, bringing their hearts with them, and a wedding garment on them ; and who approach only in shew.

This he does,

1. As omniscient, and so, *All things and persons are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*, Heb. iv. 13. His eyes are like a flame of fire, piercing and looking through every man's heart, and observing the state of his soul, as well as the tenour of his life.

2. He observes mens hearts now, as he will bring every work into judgment, with every even the most secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil ; and doth this in order to render to every man according to his deeds.

III. Such therefore as would come with acceptance to God, as guests, are to come with a wedding garment on.

Such

Such as went to marriage feasts in all times of the world, were wont to put on their best attire. But some think, that it is to some particular garment in use in our Saviour's time on earth, to which an allusion is here made.

If we come to the feast which God hath prepared with acceptance, we are to come, 1. With the garment of Christ's righteousness for the justification of our persons. 2. With souls adorned with the graces of his Spirit, to be exercised in our sitting with the king at his table.

1. The righteousness of Christ is the wedding garment which every one is concerned to have on.

For this the Apostle expresses an high value, *Phil. iii. 8, 9. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

Without this we may be said, to be found naked, or which is worse, defiled, and so cannot expect that when the king comes to view his guests, we should be *found of him in peace*, 2 Pet. iii. 14.

It is sad to appear before God, with no other covering than filthy rags: And there is no finding grace with him, or obtaining of a blessing from him, but in the garment of our elder brother. Hence it is that we are so often bid to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, *Romans xiii. 14. and*

Gal. iii. 27. and to buy of him white rayment to cover us, that the shame of our nakedness may not appear, *Rev.* iii. 17, 18. And in order to this, he hath brought in everlasting righteousness, which is the garment we are to have on.

2. The graces of the Spirit to be exercised in sitting with the king at his table, are also included in the wedding garment. It is as dressed in these, that the king's daughter is all-glorious within, these jewels and ornaments which are to be put on. These two things may be expressed by one wedding garment, because they go together, and are never parted. The righteousness of Christ is never put on a soul utterly un sanctified and in its natural unconverted state: And where any, by being in Christ is a new creature, having him made to him sanctification, that soul has him for righteousness too.

Without the wedding garment denoting the graces of the Spirit, the soul is not suited to the feast prepared. How can he discern Christ's body, that is destitute of faith? Or feed upon him that hath no spiritual appetite? Or have communion with him that is as opposite to him as light is to darkness? But when these our ornaments are on, and grace in exercise, it is, as found interested in the righteousness of Christ, that we are to be accepted as to our persons, and then as to what we sincerely perform; and to have our failures overlooked, our infirmities pitied, and the king smile upon us, through him in whom he is always well pleased. Having on Christ, and being made partakers of a new nature, *that*
is,

is, being washed and justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God, is having on the wedding garment, in which we are to come to the feast prepared, and so as to be approved.

IV. God will assuredly find out, and discover every one that comes without it.

It is said, when *the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment*: which does not signify, that there was but one unsound; but plainly intimates, that if there is but one among multitudes of others, God will surely discover him, and sooner or later single him out, by saying, *Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?*

Though many are to be called into the church, it is required that they come as Christians indeed, and so attend upon the ordinances of the gospel, denoted by the feast prepared. When any think to cover a carnal heart and life under a formal specious profession, God will sooner or later find him out.

This may be concluded,

1. From his all-discerning eye, as the searcher of hearts, and trier of the reins, and one well knowing who they are that say, *They are Jews or Christians*, when they are not, but do lie. As it is God with whom carnal professors have to do, there is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves, *Job xxxiv. 22.*

(2.) It may be concluded, as hypocrisy is most hateful to God, and what he seems concerned,
in

in vindication of his unspotted purity, to detect. *These things thou hast done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thee,* Psalm l. 21. The delusion shall be exposed, and the wickedness shewn.

This God has various ways of doing: for example, by trying judgments, which are represented as the fan in Christ's hand, by which he will thoroughly purge his floor, *Matth. iii. 12.* and with reference to his making use of these, he threatens to search *Jerusalem* with candles, *Zeph. i. 12.*

By suffering errors and divisions to rise up and prevail in the church; or by permitting persecution for righteousness sake, *Matth. xviii. 7. 1 Cor. xi. 19.*

Often by death, when men usually awake out of their delusion: but, at farthest, at judgment. Then it will be in vain for such as have no oil in their vessels, to come and cry, Lord, Lord, open unto us: we have eaten and drunk in thy presence; for he will profess, I never knew you, depart from me ye workers of iniquity.

V. Sinners shall be struck dumb when God comes to deal with them. The king said, *Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment? And he was speechless.*

The sinners in *Sion* will be confounded at last.

1. They shall not be able to object, That under the gospel they were not acquainted, that a wedding garment was necessary.

2. They shall not be able to object against the patience of God, as not long enough bearing with them.

3. They

3. They shall have nothing to object against the goodness of God, as not striving with them by his Spirit.

4. They shall have nothing to plead to cover their perfidiousness, that under the name of friends they should nourish enmity in their hearts.

5. They shall have nothing to plead to extenuate the guilt of endeavouring to mock God, by intruding into his house under a disguise.

6. They shall have nothing to say in excuse for their folly and madness in all this.

Lastly, They shall have nothing to plead against the justice of God, and in bar to their being sentenced by it to the wrath deserved.

VI. Their case is sad who shall be found without the wedding garment, they being liable to the worst punishment; for concerning each of them the judge will say, *Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

1. How awful are such words as these: *Bind him hand and foot*, noting the seizure of justice, and the sinner deprived of all power to resist it, or of finding means of escaping it?

2. *Take him away*, i. e. from the company of the friends of God, and all the privileges he without ground laid claim to in this world, and from the delusive hope he had of happiness in another.

3. *Cast him into outer darkness*, the place of horror and despair, where *there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

APPLICATION.

1. Be not satisfied in putting yourselves among the friends of God, and going as guests to the feast prepared for such, without some comfortable hope of having a wedding garment on.

Examine yourselves if you have the wedding garment; and if you think you have it, how you came by it.

(1.) Have you been made to see your own vileness as clothed in filthy garments, and made willing to change them, and put them off?

(2.) Have you applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, as poor and miserable, blind and naked, to buy of him the white raiment, the righteousness of the saints? Have you been waiting upon him in the way of his appointments, to be made partakers of what you need? If you have on the wedding garment, you can say something to this, it being the way in which it was obtained.

If not, this is the course you are to take: and as ever you would shew yourselves the friends indeed of the bridegroom; as you would not be Christians only in name, and make a profession only to your greater condemnation; as you would be welcome to the great Lord of the feast, and have a holy confidence before him, speedily do this.

2. Doth the king take notice of every one that comes (to the ordinance of the Lord's supper particularly) without the wedding garment? So he also observes who they are, that having a wedding garment stay away. And as the presumption of the one is inexcusable; so also is the dejection and absence of the other.

Let

Let no sincere but weak Christian be dismayed by the king's narrow observance of the guests, from coming, and through fear leave his place vacant. The same doctrine that speaks terror to the hypocrite, may, and ought to be improved as a ground of comfort to you. As the one will be asked, why he came in hither, and be speechless; so you will have no excuse for staying away.

Christians, God, even your own God will come to view the guests; and he can discern the grace in you that you may not be able to discern yourselves.

He will meet you at his table, who is witness to all your preparations, to what requests you have put up, to what desires have been at work to get the wedding garment, and have it on. He will also take notice of your wants and weaknesses, burdens and complaints, and bid you ask what you will, and it shall be granted; to the end that your souls may be satisfied, and you all say, It is good to draw nigh unto God.

S E R M O N XIII.

LUKE VII. 41, 42, 43.

There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most ?

Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

THESE words are a parable proposed by our Lord, to display the riches of forgiving grace, and the love it raises in the hearts of those that obtain it ; the greater degree of love, the larger and greater the debt is, which is forgiven and cancelled by it.

The creditor spoken of, represents the great God.

By the debtors are set forth offending sinners, among men.

Among these there is a difference, as some owe more than others. Some may be said to owe five hundred pence to God, others, comparatively,

but *fifty* : but they agree in this, that they are equally insolvent, and have nothing wherewith to pay.

The *creditor's* dealing with them, is represented as most kind and endearing : *He frankly forgave them both.* But his eminent and abounding grace shewn forth by discharging such as are by far the greatest debtors, calleth and leadeth them to shew greater love to him, than can ordinarily be expected to be shewn by such as are lesser debtors, for their gracious discharge.

From the whole, we may observe these *six* things.

1. That sinners are in debt to God, as having violated his law, and so laid themselves open to the punishment threatened : *The wages of sin is death.*

2. Some have contracted greater guilt, and so are more in debt to God than others, as having laid themselves open to greater punishment : from the greater advantages they have enjoyed, and abused, they have more to answer for, and more to fear.

3. It is the common condition of sinners indebted to God, that they have nothing to pay, nothing to satisfy divine justice, or redeem themselves from deserved wrath. The redemption of the soul is precious, and for any thing that we can do, must cease for ever.

4. God is able and ready to forgive the greatest debt and debtors, as well as the least, those that owe five hundred pence, as well as those that owe fifty. The bible is full of this doctrine : 'tis a faithful saying, and worthy of all accep-

acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

5. Whom God forgives, he forgives freely : not excluding the satisfaction of Christ, but upon the account of it ; which is so far from lessening the freeness of that grace that forgives us, that it greatly exalts it : for, it was God himself that found the ransom, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, wherein he commendeth his love to us.

6. Such as God has freely forgiven are bound to love him, and to love him the more, the greater the debt is which is forgiven them.

Under this our work will be to shew,

I. That some who have ran far in debt to God, have been forgiven.

II. What there is in forgiving grace, to be an argument for love in those to whom it is shewn.

III. How God's grace, as freely forgiving greater debts, should lead the forgiven soul to love him the more.

I. Some who have ran far in debt to God, have been forgiven.

Manasseh in the *Old Testament*, and *Paul*, and *Mary Magdalene*, and some of the *Corinthians* in the *New*, are instances of this. And the order and invitation is still in force, *Isaiab* lv. 7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* It may seem strange that a holy God should bear so long with provoking sinners, who so many ways declare

clare their enmity against him by their wicked works: but,

1. Thus he magnifies his patience, and proves it divine, the patience of God, and not of a creature, much less of a man. After God had reckoned up *Ephraim's* sins, and read the charge, when it might have been expected that sentence should follow, he declares, *Hos. xi. 9. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man.* None but God, who is one of infinite patience, could bear with the multiplied injuries done in the world. But the more sin is multiplied, the more the patience and long-suffering of God is magnified.

The apostle *Paul* calls himself the chief of sinners, and then adds, as to the patience exercised towards him, *1 Tim. i. 16. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern, &c.* What adorable patience is God able and vouchsafes to exercise towards provoking sinners.

2. Some whose iniquities have abounded have been forgiven, for the greater exaltation of grace. It is the glory of man *to pass by a transgression*, *Prov. xix. 11.* And it is the name God proclaims himself by, as his glory, that He is *the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.* He pardoneth iniquity, transgression and sin.

Grace is thus exalted and glorified,

(1.) In its fulness; that so where sin hath abounded, grace may much more abound. From

258 . *The thirteenth Sermon.*

God's forbearance finners take the boldness to run deep on score, and when having nothing to pay, instead of casting them into prison, *he frankly forgives them all.* Now what riches of grace must it argue, to pardon and remit not only a few pence, but thousands of talents ?

As to the forgiveness of sins, and mens apprehensions concerning the greatness of the grace of it, God declares, that as far as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than their ways, and his thoughts than their thoughts, *Isaiab lv. 9.* The gospel is intitled goodwill towards men, from assuring them of forgiveness with him for iniquity, transgression and sin. He keeps mercy for thousands in readiness to deal it out, and casteth their iniquities behind his back ; and where sins are multiplied, he has mercy in store to multiply to pardon. It is over and over repeated to a sinful people, *Jer. xxxiii. 8. I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me, and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.*

(2.) Herein grace shines in its freeness : which, that it may be regarded, it is God's method, before he makes the offer of pardon, to sum up what finners have been and done. See *Isaiab xliii. 22, 23, 24. But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings, neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices, &c. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me*

me with the fat of thy sacrifices : but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. And yet, after this heinous charge, instead of resolving upon vengeance, he immediately adds, verse 25. *I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins :* in which declaration how gloriously doth grace appear ? And, how often has he acted according to it ? And he is still a God that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage ; he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

Sins of the deepest dye, like crimson and scarlet, have been forgiven, and the most heinous offenders received to favour ; and assurance given to others of the same mercy, from their breaking off from sin, and turning to God. *Cease to do evil, learn to do well, &c.* Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord : *tho' your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool,* Isaiah i. 16, 17, 18. It is the glory of God to forgive a multitude of sins ; and where sin hath abounded, there is an opportunity for grace to abound so much the more. There is a multitude of tender mercies with God, for forgiving sins, and abundant virtue and efficacy in the death and intercession of Christ, to keep open the way for his mercy to be shewn. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him. Some, whose sins have exceeded for number and

nature, have been forgiven, and others encouraged to hope for the same mercy.

But this leads us to consider,

II. What there is in forgiving grace to be an argument for love in those that receive it.

If blessedness be an argument for love, forgiveness has this belonging to it, and connected with it, *Psalms xxxii. 1, 2. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.*

This is a comprehensive blessing, and the foundation of many others. They who have their sins forgiven, are freed from the greatest evil, the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation. The wrath of an earthly prince is terrible as the roaring of a lion: how much more dreadful must be the wrath of God, and how miserable must be the case, to be under a sentence to this, as to be endured for ever? O the blessedness to be set free from it, as every one is whose sin is forgiven. Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect, when it is God that justifieth? Who is he that condemneth, when it is Christ that died? *Rom. viii. 33, 34.* And how great is the privilege to be freed from everlasting condemnation, and delivered from hell, and the danger of being cast into it! Blessed is he on whom the second death hath no power: whatever be his condition in this world, he has nothing to fear as to another; he shall not be hurt of the second death.

Pardon of sin is a covenant-mercy, always connected with the favour of God, and a special

cial relation to him. *Jeremiah xxxi. 33, 34. I will be their God, and they shall be my people, &c. for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* The pardoned sinner hath thereby a foundation for peace of conscience. There may be a separation between pardon and actual grace, but not between pardon, and the ground for it: *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, Romans v. 1.* This opens a way for access to God, and communion with him. Forgiveness is never bestowed, but the golden sceptre is held out to invite us to come into God's presence. Sin, unpardoned, separates between God and the soul, *Isaiah lix. 2.* But when sin is forgiven, the partition-wall is taken down, and the soul has free access to God in prayer and other ordinances, being accepted in the Beloved.

The pardon of sin will sweeten every other mercy, and render any outward burden or affliction tolerable. Sin imbitters, and adds a weight to any affliction; but pardon doth lighten and sweeten it. We shall not cry out under the troubles and disappointments of the world, we are undone, if we have ground to conclude, that we are forgiven of God. Outward comforts and accommodations, accompanied with a pardon of our sins, are blessings indeed, and may be relished as such: but, if we had all the riches and prosperity in the world, the guilt of sin lying unpardoned upon conscience, and the apprehensions of the wrath of God, would spoil the satisfaction of all.

In a word, the finner, pardoned in this world, shall have eternal life in the future. These two can never be severed. Sinners may know, that without pardon hell must be their portion. How rich or great soever they are in this world, without forgiveness all their worldly happiness will end in torment. And what comfort can that man take in any thing in this world, who may any moment expect an arrest from God, and a demand of all his debts, when he has not a farthing of his own to pay, nor any interest in the only all-sufficient surety? But he that is pardoned, besides all his privileges upon earth, hath, moreover, a title to the inheritance of the saints reserved in heaven, in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and where there are pleasures for evermore. Here-upon let us see,

III. How God's grace, as freely forgiving greater debts, should lead the forgiven soul to love him the more. And here God's rich grace freely forgiving greater debts.

1. Tends to this, as it frees the soul from greater torment, to which its multiplied sins laid it open, especially those committed against light and grace. If the wages of every sin is death, what wrath is deserved by sins without number? And who can think of this, and not be affected with the grace that gives him a discharge from all?

2. God's mercy, as forgiving greater debts, may free the soul from the more tormentful apprehensions it is under, even here, of the wrath

to come, and so engage him to love the more. What words can represent or convey to another, the perplexities of such as are awakened to a sense of their sins, and held under a spirit of bondage? Who look upward, and apprehend God angry; and downward, and see, and think they even feel hell opening to swallow them up? To whom life is a burden by reason of sin; and yet death is the king of terrors, as it will transmit them to judgment.

Their loud cries and complaints tell us, they know not what to do, how to get rid of their pressing load, or bear up under it; being sensible of their danger from unpardoned sin, and that forgiveness alone can give them relief. Their spirit is now deeply wounded, and nothing but the voice of pardoning mercy can heal it. *I have sinned greatly, said David, and his heart smote him: and then he prayed, And now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant, 2 Samuel xxiv. 10.* Nothing else could give him ease and quiet from an accusing, troubled conscience; but this would effectually do it. *The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity, Isaiah xxxiii. 24.* The meer patience and forbearance of God, without forgiveness, will not answer the exigency of sinners cases. Though they are out of hell, they know not how long they shall be so, nor how soon they may be in the lowest place, and in the hottest flames there.

It is the sense of unpardoned sin that breaks their bones, and drieth up their marrow : the arrows of the Almighty, sticking in them ; cause a smart that no words can utter. They apprehend themselves under condemnation, and can have no ease, till secured of forgiveness by faith in the blood of Jesus, the spring and foundation of all comfort and peace, *Isaiah xl. 1, 2. Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.* Till this is done, they are under the curse of God on record, which cuts off from him, and all good : a curse that pierces deep, and spreads far ; that is intolerable in its effects, and unavoidable too. *There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones, saith the Psalmist, because of my sin, Psalm xxxviii. 3.* Sins are an heavy burden, they are too heavy for the sinner : and till they are removed by forgiveness, what ease or peace can he enjoy ?

It is true, sensual gratifications, or worldly business, may keep off a sense of this for a time ; but when conscience awakes, sin revives, and the sinner dies. Some may laugh at this for a time, and make a hard shift to preserve a false peace ; but what bitterness is it found in the end ? The more careless and secure, airy and presumptuous they have been in health and prosperity, under the guilt of multiplied, aggravated transgressions ; with the greater horror they are filled when the hand-writing appears, and
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their sins are set in order before them : and no message can reach their case, or make their broken bones to rejoice, but that of redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of their sins.

This is one reason of the soul's greater love. The consideration of the distress and agony it felt when unreconciled to God, condemned already, and every moment in danger of being summoned by death to judgment ; and so sent into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

O the sadness of the case of such an one, who hath all the threatnings in the book of God against him, and nothing but a little breath between him and endless torment. What is all the pomp and wealth of this world to such an one, without forgiveness ? How can he eat or drink or sleep in peace ? How heavily must he set about any thing in this world, while under the fearful expectation of wrath in another ? To be delivered out of such a state is a mercy indeed : And a discharge from greater terror, may well lead the pardoned sinner to love him the more, from whom he hath obtained it.

3. The greater and more astonishing grace abounding towards great sinners, and singling them out for mercy when others are left, is another ground of greater love. How far, will such an one say, with flowing eyes and a melting heart, how far had I run from God ! How heinously and how many ways had I sinned against him ! What a quick dispatch hath he made of others, while he spared me ! He hath taken some away in the
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height of their rebellion, refusing to give them farther time and space to repent : He hath called some to judgment in their youth, soon after they have broken the fetters of their pious education, cast off the God of their fathers, and given themselves up to a course of sin.

Many that were not so great sinners as I have been, are gone to their own place, while he hath waited to be gracious to me ; intreated me to accept of mercy, and persuaded me to do it, when he might instead of this, most deservedly have condemned me to remediless wrath. How unworthy had I rendered myself of any such grace, and how deep were my fears of perishing for ever according to my just deserts ! I long went on making light of Christ, grieving the Spirit, serving the devil, and treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. O the grace that will abundantly pardon such iniquities as mine, deliver me from going down into the pit, and restore me to the favour of God and a state of reconciliation with him ! The condition of such a soul is made up of sorrow and joy, humble confusion and confidence, leading by it a pardoned debtor, to love much, to whom so much is forgiven, so much grace is shewn.

How readily, will such a soul insist to say, hath God forgiven the sins that made me as fuel for everlasting burnings, and received me to mercy, when I deserved to be rejected for ever as a worker of iniquity ! My iniquities were gone over my head, for number and nature had greatly exceeded, lay as an intolerable burden upon me,
and

and it was difficult to me to admit the thought, that it would ever be taken off, till it had sunk me to the lowest hell. I had sinned against light, broke through the warnings and restraints of conscience, disvalued the favour of God when offered, and securely ventured upon his wrath: But the greatness of his mercy, and the blood of his Son cancelled all my offences against, and the debts I owed to his offended justice.

What strange, what astonishing grace, what endearing kindness is it, that God should speak such language as this to me, though for lying vanities thou hast forsaken thy own mercies, yet return unto me, and see my arms and heart open to receive thee: As I live, I delight not in the death of sinners, and thou art an instance of it. Though thou hast heinously and long rebelled against me, I am loth to cast thee off. Long since I might have sworn in my wrath, that thou shouldst never enter into my rest, but instead of it, have shut thee up in that prison from whence there is no redemption: But my bowels yearn, judgment is my strange work, mercy my delight; and though thou owest five hundred talents, and hast nothing to pay, *I frankly forgive thee all.* What a powerful argument to love, is this!

APPLICATION.

1. Have such as have run deeply in debt to God, been freely forgiven by him? What reason have we then to believe him when he declares himself thus, *As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live?* And accordingly, it is with
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the greatest tenderness that he gives out the exhortation, *Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die?* Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

2. How unreasonable are the hard and horrid thoughts, whereby sinners, awakened to a sense of their vileness and guilt, are kept off from a forgiving God? He hath proclaimed and proved mercy to be his delight, even towards the most unworthy, by frankly cancelling all the score of those upon whom he hath the largest demands, but yet who have nothing wherewith to pay?

3. How disingenuous would it be for any to go on with the greater security and boldness, in sin, because God is ready so freely to forgive the greatest debt? This would be to cross the nature and design of grace, and cut off from ourselves all pleas for it. *Shall we, saith the Apostle, continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.* The thought is shocking, and strikes with horror. It can come from no where, but from hell, and leads to it: As there is not a more dangerous symptom of a forsaken soul, than to presume to sin upon this consideration: That God is ready to forgive the greatest debt, and thereupon to put it to the trial. To do thus, is to turn the grace of God into wantonness: And what, but perdition, can be the end of such a course?

4. For the greatest sinners to say, There is no hope in their case, is to say what they have no warrant for, from God or his word. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: Who hath been the propitiation for sin, and is exalted to be a Prince and

a Saviour, to give both repentance and forgiveness; and this is the gospel, which he hath commanded to be preached in his name, among all nations. Upon this ground the weary and heavy laden are to apply to God in Christ, by earnest prayer for repentance and faith, that the burden of sin may be taken off, and they find rest unto their souls.

Lastly, Let such as have any good hope that their debts, how large soever, are forgiven, love much, yea love the more, the larger their debts have been. If we are pardoned at all, it is a very great debt from which we are discharged. O let us labour after suitable affection, and shew it.

1. By reflecting upon sin with the greater shame and sorrow, hatred and abhorrence, as committed against so good a God. *Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.*

2. Having much forgiven, love God the more, and give him the glory due unto his name. *Who is a God like unto thee, who pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by transgression, &c.* Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, &c. who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies, *Psal. ciii. 1, 2, 3, 4.*

3. Having much forgiven, let your love shew itself greater by your growing esteem of Jesus Christ, whose blood was the price of your pardon, and though it is given you freely, cost him his life. In the sense of this, to them that believe, he is precious.

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If he be so to you, shew it by your delight in his presence, and particularly by making conscience of meeting him at his table, to give him the glory of the grace you have received, and by waiting for all that you further need.

Thus shew forth his death till he come : And the time of his coming will be a time of refreshing, when your sins shall be blotted out, and you shall be led into that state where all his ransomed shall sing unto him that loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood. To him be glory and dominion for ever. *Amen.*

S E R M O N XIV.

LUKE. XVI. 2.

*—Give an account of thy stewardship :
for thou mayest be no longer steward.*

THESE words are part of a parable : and the making use of parables, comparisons and similitudes, adapted to instruct his hearers in the important doctrines he meant to communicate to them, was a way frequently used by our blessed Saviour.

In the way of relating some short particular history taken from, or built upon the way of transacting affairs in common life, which all would be desirous to hear, our Lord, at this time, and at many other times, excited his careless, his apt to be weary, yea and his prejudiced auditors to lend their attention to, and receive instruction in matters of the greatest moment to their concerns of another life, which they cared not to hear of ; and to their deep conviction too of the truth and importance of these matters, even before they were well aware of his wise design to call them to think of them.

Instruction

Instruction in moral and spiritual things by fit parables, is memorable instruction: It is an easy and pleasing way of teaching, and one stealing in upon the consciences of those only amused by it at first: For after they, from one word or two of application, come to see its drift, it often proves very awakening and convincing. Our Lord by great wisdom and art, as well as zeal and affection, got within the doors of the hearts of his hearers.

The design of our Lord in this parable we may plainly see, was to call his present auditors, and all others, to the greatest care and diligence in improving the advantages wherewith they were intrusted, as those that were accountable to God, and to fare for ever hereafter, according to their good or evil management and conduct here.

The *steward* spoken of in the text, points to every man and woman in the world.

The *goods* he was entrusted with, represent the several talents received by them.

The *certain rich man*, whose servant the steward was, notes the great God, by and from whom all gifts and advantages of every kind are committed to us his creatures. The *account* demanded of the *steward*, refers to the strict enquiry that will be made another day, how every one has improved, or wasted this his Lord's *goods* or gifts: according to which he will be approved or condemned.

And warning is given of the certainty and approach of such a day, from the notice they have in scripture that their state of probation shall end,
and

and be followed with eternal happiness, or misery, according as they have behaved in their trust. *Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayst be no longer steward.*

Hence, the truths obvious to be observed are these,

I. Every one of us in the present life, has the character and place of a steward.

II. The time of our stewardship will have an end.

III. On our ceasing to be or act as stewards, an account of our stewardship will be required : *Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayst be no longer steward.*

I. In the present life, every one of us has the character and place of a steward.

Thus we are considered of God : And what an influence would it have upon our hearts and lives, did we always thus consider ourselves ?

Steward is a title of trust. And here the enquiry may be made, What the *goods* include, with respect to which we may be said to be *stewards*.

These take in whatever valuable gift or privilege we are intrusted with. We have nothing but what we have received from the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift descends ; and hence are said to be stewards of the manifold grace of God, 1 *Pet.* iv. 10.

Particularly,

1. Reason or understanding is the gift of God, and as endued with This, we may be said to be stewards to employ and use it for

him. *Job xxxii. 8. There is a spirit in man ; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.* By this a man is in a capacity to consider who and what he is ; by whom he was made, and for what end, *namely*, to know, and love, and obey his Maker, and to take up his chief felicity in him, as infinitely preferable to all the world.

Such as have reason in exercise, are capable of considering the emptiness and vanity of all things here below : How fast the fashion of the world passes away, and how soon, with any one generation, it will have an end : And therefore, that what relates to it is inconsiderable, in comparison of the life and immortality brought to light by the gospel ; and that, as we are here upon our trial for an after everlasting state, to prepare for that state, is our main concern, in which we should early engage, and ought steadily to pursue, by doing whatever our hand findeth to do with all our might ; seeing that there is no knowledge, nor counsel, nor work in the grave, into which we are going ; and so, whatever is done for eternity, must be now or never. There is no room to boast of to-morrow, none knowing what a day will bring forth. As reason is given for such purposes as these, it appears to be a very valuable blessing : which is one thing of which we are stewards.

2. Time wherein to know the things of our peace, and work out our salvation, is another privilege the Father of mercies entrusts with us. There is a time to be born, and a time to die :
and,

and, that the latter, as to any, is set at so many years distance from the former, is owing to the patience and long-suffering of God. He declares, *As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked*, and therefore give them space to repent: And in this space, what pity is it that it should be said of any, That they repent not, but despising the riches of the divine goodness and long-suffering, after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God? How great a mercy is life in a state of hope! For a guilty creature to be spared out of hell, and this as an opportunity to fly from the wrath to come, and make sure of heaven and glory!

What would those lost souls that are gone into a miserable eternity, give for those precious moments that they have here neglected, and spent in vanity and sin? O the mercy, to be yet in the way with God, in a world where we may acquaint ourselves with him and be at peace! Who can tell how soon the happy season will be over, no more to be recalled for ever? and yet how few make conscience of employing it as they ought, and answerably to its worth, and the awful concerns they have to mind, as those that have death and judgment to prepare for, heaven to win, and hell to escape, and souls to save? But to how great a degree soever sinners mispend their time, of this they shall know, they were but stewards.

3. Bodily health and strength in whatever measure enjoyed, are among the talents and trusts received from God. These qualify for greater service for God, and our generation, and should make us more abundant and chearful in this with them. None know but those that feel it, what a clog and burden a weak and pained body is to the soul: And where instead of this, any are favoured with a healthful vigorous constitution, enabling them to go on with delight in the work and duty of their place; what reason have they to acknowledge the goodness of God, and to see to it, that it be not received in vain?

4. External wealth and riches are among the things of which the possessors are to be considered as stewards. By these they are set in a way to be freed from many difficulties which others struggle with, and can hardly support under. They that in this respect have received more than others, are obliged to do more than others. Though many forget God in the midst of outward abundance, and encreasing riches do engross their hearts, it should not be so. It is God that gives power to get wealth, and the use to be made of it; our Lord tells us, a few verses after the text: *I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*

5. The word, ordinances and means of grace, are farther talents, in respect of which we are stewards. The helps and advantages we enjoy for our souls, are endearing instances of the goodness

ness of God ; and he strictly observes what use we make of them. It is not a small thing to have the word of God in our hands, the gospel sounding in our ears, the things of our peace laid open before us, and the Spirit of God striving with us to engage us to attend to them, and comply with them : This is a treasure, of which, as stewards we must give an account.

6. Saving grace, wherever vouchsafed, is a talent and trust indeed, speaking the happy persons with whom it is lodged, born from heaven ; and which they are to improve to the best purposes in the way thither. These are the things, in regard of some or other of which, every one in the present life may be said to be a steward ; a steward for God, and to be accountable to him. And under this thought, how earnestly should we pray for wisdom and faithfulness, the qualifications necessary to the giving up our account with joy ?

But this bring us to the

II. Thing observed, *namely*, That the time of our stewardship will have an end.

1. It will end *certainly* at death. We may indeed be deprived of many of our talents while we live : Health may be exchanged for sickness, riches for poverty, the use of reason may be taken from us, or we may have no publick ordinances or means of grace to attend upon : But if we should be favoured with these as long as we live, our stewardship must necessarily conclude at death, that is, with our last breath our state of probation ends. Then instead of acting any longer for an after-state, we are immediately

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to enter upon it. For this, the decree is fixed, *It is appointed to men once to die, and after that the judgment.* Thus our stewardship will end certainly.

2. It may end *suddenly*, or by a sudden death. All our times are in God's hand, and he may cut them off when he pleases. We know not but any day or night we live may prove our last. The talents our Lord hath committed to us, we are bid to occupy till he come: But, to keep us always waking and watchful, he has not told us when it shall be, whether a year hence, or before the next day. We read of one that reckoned upon many years to come, whose soul was that night required of him: And who can say, it shall not be thus with himself? Such as have lived before us have had their stewardship concluded variously: Some have had long warning by lingring sickness, or wasting pain; others have been snatched away without any previous notice, being well and dead almost in the same moment: Some have had their stewardship continued to a good old age, when they have been gently removed; others have been summoned hence in the midst of their health and strength, having the earthly tabernacle violently pulled down, that seemed to be built for a much longer time.

3. Our stewardship, *once ended, shall be renewed no more.* When the order is issued forth, *Give an account of thy stewardship: for thou mayst be no longer steward,* it cannot be protracted; and being over, shall not afterwards any more begin anew. It is appointed unto men
once

once to die : and if we die under the charge and guilt of having wasted our Lord's goods, and have not answered the end of our stewardship, there is no returning to rectify any thing wherein we have failed.

O how awful a thing is it to die, we being to do this but once : upon which our state of trial ends, and a fixed unchangeable state of happiness or misery begins. When death comes, our negligences and mismanagement are fatal. When told we are to be stewards no longer, could all the world be offered for a little respite, to put our accounts in better order, it is not to be obtained : We must be gone and come back no more. When once dead, we are to be always so, as to the present world and state.

He that dies in sin, sinks straitway into hell, from whence there is no redemption. Death transmits every one to judgment, where he is fixed for happiness or misery, without possibility of change.

This leads to the

III^d Thing observed, *namely*, That upon our ceasing to be stewards, an account of our stewardship will be required : *Give an account of thy stewardship : for thou mayst be no longer steward.*

Here it is natural to enquire,

1. Who must give an account ?
2. To whom he must give it ?
3. For what ?
4. When ?
5. What is carried in this ?

T 4

1. Who

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1. Who must give an account? I answer, every one that lives and is here a steward. All that have goods entrusted with them, are to be brought to a reckoning, *Rom. xiv. 12.* So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

2. To whom? And this is to God; To God by Christ, to whom all judgment is committed. God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead, *Acts xvii. 31.* We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and give an account to him, who is to determine concerning all, and appoint them their everlasting state of reward or punishment, according as they have been faithful, or unfaithful servants.

3. Of what will an account be demanded? The text says, of our *stewardship*, i. e. How we have acted in it while it lasted: What talents we received, and what we did with them; whether they were employed, or hid, improved, or wasted: Whether we acted according to our character, and as expecting to be called to an account, and daily prepared for it; or, whether we lived on earth as mindless of God, our souls and the world to come, as if we had been to have lived always here; or if not, yet were to live no more after our natural deaths. *Eccles. xii. 14.* For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

4. When

4. When will such an account be demanded?

The scripture tells us,

(1.) Immediately upon every one's going out of his stewardship. Upon the dissolution of soul and body, our stewardship is at an end : upon which we are assured, that *then shall the dust return to the earth as it was : and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it*, Ecclesiastes xii. 7.

(2.) Most solemnly at the last day, when all must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad, 2 Cor. v. 10.

Thus an account will be demanded, and is to be given up.

5. What is carried in the expression, *Give an account of thy stewardship*?

This plainly denotes,

(1.) That God will deal with every one in particular. O man, O woman, such and such talents thou hast been intrusted with ; what hast thou done with them? *Give an account of thy stewardship*. And, as he will be particular as to persons ; so as to every one's account, enquiring into the several articles that make it up.

(2.) *Give an account*, &c. This farther implies, that notice is taken, and records kept of what every one now does, and this in order to a future judgment, when all is to be produced, and sentence publicly passed. We read, *Rev. xx. 12.* that *the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works*. The book of the scripture shall be opened, with respect to those to whom

whom it was vouchsafed, shewing what was the will of God, and so, what they were to have done : and the book of conscience, witnessing for, or against us, according to our actings during our state of trial, shall be opened.

(3.) Every one's account called for to be given, shall be according to the talents wherewith he was intrusted. God knows the privileges every one has enjoyed ; with whom they have been greater, with whom less : and with an eye to these, will say to every one, Give an account of thy stewardship, and as that account shall be found, thou shalt receive thy doom. Thou mayst be no longer steward, that part is over, but the fruits of it follow, in which thou art to be happy or miserable for ever.

APPLICATION.

1. Is every one in the present life to be considered as a steward of all that he enjoys ? How unreasonable is pride in those who have the largest share of their Lord's goods ; as they have nothing but what they have received, and the more their talents, the greater the trust. Where much is given, the more is expected, and will be required. As we are *stewards*, we stand related to the Most High, as *our Lord* ; have every one to do with him, and must be called before him, to answer such enquiries as shall be made concerning our management of what was given us in trust.

God has not so committed any thing to our trust, as to relinquish his own interest in it, or concern about it. We are to act under him according to his appointment and direction, regarding his authority, and endeavouring to answer his expecta-

expectation, in the use and improvement of the talents received ; of which we are not Lords, but stewards.

It is God that intrusteth us with all the advantages we enjoy, and we hold them in a dependance upon him. Our reason, our time, our health and strength, our external accommodations, and the helps we have for our souls under the means of grace, are intirely in his power ; which we are to own with an humility that becomes stewards.

2. What cause of serious concern have all that live under the gospel, lest, as stewards of the manifold grace of God, they should receive it in vain, and have their future condemnation aggravated by their present advantages, as neglected, or abused ?

3. Will the time of our stewardship have an end ? What a regard does this challenge to it ? What a value should we put upon it, as a season in which we are to act for eternity ; and at the close of which we are to go out of our stewardship into endless joy, or misery ?

4. The believer has no reason to faint under the difficulties of his stewardship ; seeing it will have an end, a most desirable one : and, neither the services, nor sufferings of the present time, are worthy to be compared to the glory to be revealed.

5. When our stewardship ends must an account be given up ? It is hence evident, that the soul survives the body ; and is capable of acting, and of being dealt with in a way of wrath, or mercy,

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cy, according to the state in which it goes away: and hereupon,

6. How great and important a thing is it to die; it being to go in spirit to appear before God, and give an account of all that we have done in the body, and to be dealt with accordingly? How light soever the generality make of this, To die to such a purpose as this, is most awful in itself, and ought to be so to us. With what seriousness should we put the question, How are we prepared for such a change, and what is consequent upon it? What reason have the most to lament, that they have made no better preparation hitherto; and with what seriousness should we now begin?

And, in order to shew you, how to do this, I will conclude with two or three directions for your assistance.

(1.) Call yourselves to an account as to the state you are in, and the part you have acted: you are to come to a reckoning with God.

(2.) Let an interest in Christ be secured now, as ever you would hope to find mercy in the great day of accounts. There is no having our persons accepted, all objections against us silenced and thrown out, but as found in him, clothed with his righteousness. To them that are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation: but there is nothing but condemnation to all besides.

3. Beg of God the wisdom and faithfulness necessary to discharge your stewardship well: you have need of both.

(1.) Of wisdom to know the value of the talents you are intrusted with, the will of your great

great Lord concerning their improvement, the manner in which you are to employ them, and how much depends upon your employing them aright.

(2.) You have need of faithfulness; that so you may act becoming your character, and may use the talents wherewith you are intrusted, as under the eye of God, whose stewards you are, with a sincere desire to please him now, and with an holy concern to find mercy from him another day.

(4.) Live in a serious belief, that the day of your stewardship's ending, and the account to be given, is approaching: that it cannot be many years, and that it may be within a few days, that your souls and accounts shall both be called for.

And as the time is short, hear and pray, and walk and act as persons waiting for your Lord. Blessed is that servant who when his Lord cometh, shall be found thus doing, and in this way receives the summons that will e're long be given to every one of us, *Give an account of thy stewardship.*

S E R M O N XV.

LUKE XXII. 15.

And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.

THESE are the words of our Redeemer when drawing near the close of his life, and having his death in view, which we are now going to remember at his table.

It was in the night in which he was betrayed that Christ thus spake : letting us know hereby, how he stood affected to his approaching dissolution, and to what was to go before it, and lead it on.

At the seventh verse, we read that *the day of unleavened bread came, when the passover must be killed.* And, verse 8. *He sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.* And upon their enquiring, Where he would have the preparation made ? He bids them, upon their entrance into the city, to follow a man they should meet bearing *a pitcher of water, into the house where he entered in,* and deliver this message

sage from him to the good man of the house, *The Master saith unto thee, where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?* verses 10, 11. And as a proof of his omniscience and power, he tells them of the man's ready compliance with his desire. Hence observe, when Christ has a passover to eat, he will not want an heart, nor a convenient place for his own, and his friends reception, verse 12. *And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready.*

Peter and John went and found the guide and house, and room, as he, their Lord, had said unto them; for they that go upon Christ's word and errand, need not fear a disappointment. Here, according to the order given them, they made ready the passover, verse 14. *And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him;* to whom he thus speaks, as in the words of the text, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.*

In the words we have visibly two parts.

- I. The well-pleasedness with which Christ spake of the last passover he was to eat with his disciples upon the earth, and the special welcome he gives to it; *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you.*
- II. The prospect he had of his suffering and death, which were to follow his eating this passover, and his hearty willingness to meet and go through them; *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer,* i. e. after which I shall eat no more, but be, myself, soon after crucified and slain.

Both these deserve to be distinctly considered.

I. The well-pleasedness with which Christ spake of the last passover he was to keep with his disciples immediately before his death, and the special welcome he gives to it; *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you.*

The institution of the passover feast, with the occasion of it, we have at large in *Exodus xii.* *Pharaoh* having hardened his heart against many former plagues, and refusing to let *Israel* go, God resolved to bring him to it, by slaying all the first-born of *Egypt* in one night. At that time, the *Israelites* for their preservation were ordered to slay a lamb, which was on the fourteenth day of the first month; and to sprinkle the posts of their doors with its blood, and to eat its flesh in their several families.

That very night the destroying angel was sent forth, and made dreadful work among the *Egyptians*, striking the first-born of every family dead; so that there was not an house where there was not one dead: but the houses of the *Israelites* being sprinkled upon the posts of the doors with the blood of the lamb, the destroying angel passed over them.

Upon this the *Israelites* were readily sent out of *Egypt* by *Pharaoh* and his people; and a commemorative feast on the paschal lamb was ordered by God to be kept in their generations, as an ordinance for ever.

This feast upon the paschal lamb, from the first occasion of it, called the *passover*, referred to the lamb killed in *Egypt*, the blood of which was sprinkled on the door-posts of the *Israelites* houses,

houses, when the destroying angel passed them over, and left them safe under the divine protection.

The lamb that was afterwards killed every year by the *Israelites*, in remembrance of that signal deliverance, was called *the passover*: the *sign* of the true lamb slain, Jesus Christ, with the feast upon it, having the name of the *thing* signified by it.

Our Lord Jesus, as made under the law, and fulfilling all righteousness, had doubtless often observed this feast: but he speaks with peculiar satisfaction and joy of that passover feast he was now to sit down at in company with his *chosen twelve*, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you*: intimating the earnestness and vehemency with which his heart was set on this, and the zeal and delight with which he approached to it. Something like this manner of expression we have in chapter xii. 50. of this evangelist, which also referreth to Christ's death and sacrifice, *I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?* He spake as if he could not be at ease or rest, till he had made his soul an offering for sin, and was baptized in his own blood, and had finished our redemption by dying for us: *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you.* Several reasons might lead him to this very earnest and strong desire. As,

1. His concern to shew a perfect subjection to the law of God his Father, and thereby to set us his followers an example of thorough obedience to his will to the utmost of our power.

He was made under the law, and would observe it, that he might fulfil all righteousness; not only for our sakes in a way of merit and atonement for our transgressions, but also as an example of obedience to God. He was born a subject, not only to the moral, but to the ceremonial law; and he, though the true passover or lamb to be slain, would keep up the observation of the typical one, and obediently stand, according to God's will, solemnizing his own shadow: he with zeal and earnestness desired to eat the passover, to put an honour upon a divine institution, and to evidence that it was his meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him into the world.

2. Christ with greater ardency might desire to eat this passover; as knowing that hereby he should put an end to one sacrament of the legal dispensation, and make way for another more excellent, that of his supper; which, in the close of this solemnity, we find he instituted in its room. The passover was an obscure forerunner of a clearer and more comfortable sacrament representing Christ, the *Lord's supper*: and after it was now this last time observed, it was to be left honourably buried, to give place to this which should succeed, even a feast upon the sacrifice of Christ, the true lamb of God, to be kept in remembrance of a full spiritual deliverance, which was formerly only predicted and promised, but now actually wrought by him, from sin and Satan, death and hell; and to continue to be observed in his church, till he should come again.

3. Love

3. Love to his disciples might be another reason of his desiring to eat this passover with them : love to manifest his care of them, and concern for them ; to have communion with them, and give them an endearing instance and evidence, that having loved his own, he loved them to the end, *i. e.* the end of his life, which might greatly tend to their support and comfort to the end of theirs. How full of tenderness and affection are these his words, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you ?*

Lastly, Christ thus ardently desired to eat this passover with his disciples now, as this was the night in which he was betrayed, very soon after which he was to die. Other passovers prefigured his death : this did both prefigure, and lead it on, and in a manner accompany it : for he rose from table, and went to the garden, where the traitor brought a band to seize him, by which he was hurried away to judgment and execution. All this he foresaw : and hence speaks with so much ardour, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you*, *i. e.* as being the last, *before I suffer.*

O the love of our blessed Lord ! How near were his friends to his heart ! How deep in it ! How steady was he in his purpose to go thro' with their redemption, whatever it cost ! When in the nearest prospect of his amazing sufferings in the garden that night, and upon the cross soon after ? When he knew that his soul must be exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and the cup was approaching to his mouth that would put him into an agony, and make him sweat drops

of blood, to say, *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer ! i. e.* This, which is to be last, and because it is to be so.

He was presently to be seized and bound, reviled and buffeted, condemned and led away to be crucified : but the near approach of his sufferings in the most terrible forms, did not abate his resolution, but rather added strength to his desire to bear them. He was so far from turning back at the terrors of the cross, that he advanced to meet them with increasing ardour, saying, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover before I suffer :* and then made his will, and instituted his supper, and solemnly prepared himself for his dying work.

But this leads us to consider,

II. The prospect Christ had of his sufferings after he had eaten this passover, in all the compass of them, and his willingness to bear them : *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you ;* soon after which my crucifixion is to follow.

Let us view a little,

1. The prospect he had before him. And,
2. His temper with reference to it.

1. The prospect Christ had before him of his sufferings, in all the compass of them. With these his mind and thoughts were often, and with the greatest seriousness, taken up : as is evident,

From his taking occasion frequently to speak to his disciples of what he was to suffer. He early, and plainly opens this, *Matthew xvi. 21. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples,*

disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. And he resumed the discourse as often as there was opportunity for it, in one place and another, Matthew xvii. 22, 23. And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. The evangelist Mark has it, that he spake that saying openly, namely, That the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again, chapter viii. 31, 32. And he bad them let the sayings sink deep into their ears, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of men, Luke ix. 44. And tho' it is said there, they understood not these sayings concerning his sufferings, it was not for want of Christ's speaking often and very plainly of them: they were much upon his own mind, and he meant not that they should be strange to theirs. Luke xviii. 31, 32, 33. Then he took to him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man, shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully intreated, and spit upon. And they shall scourge him, and put him to death.

Thus Christ had his sufferings and death much upon his mind, and shewed it by the frequent notices he gave of them.

And no wonder ; as upon his sufferings and death our redemption depended. These were the meritorious price of our being delivered from the wrath to come ; whereby pardon, grace and heaven were purchased, and himself made perfect for the bringing many sons unto glory.

Our redemption so greatly depending on these, Christ often thought and spoke of them himself : and by his example he taught his disciples and followers, what it becomes them to do, even to be often thinking of Christ's death, and their own deaths, that the awful change may be no surprize to them, but looked upon as what they are to get themselves prepared for, that they may willingly meet it.

But this brings me to the

2d Thing, Christ's temper with reference to his sufferings and death. He speaks of these in a manner that discovers his readiness and resolution to go through them, how heavy or pressing soever ; *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.*

His willingness to suffer and die, is many ways discovered.

(1.) As soon as the Father's purpose was known, this way to bring about the salvation of man, he closes it with approbation and delight. *Isaiah 1. 5. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious.* He made no excuses or delays, but with the greatest readiness approved, and then pleased himself with the office to which he was chosen, and had consented. He rejoiced in the habitable part of his earth, and his delights were with the sons of men, *Prov. viii. 31.*

(2.) He

(2.) He came into the world highly pleased, as sent of God to lay down his life, or suffer and die for mankind. He speaks with the greatest readiness to obey his Father's will, and as one who took most intimate delight in it, when about to assume our nature, wherein to suffer, *Psalm xl. 7, 8. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God.*

(3.) As the time drew on wherein he was to suffer, notwithstanding the innocent reluctancies of nature, he did not repent of his undertaking, or desist from it, but spake of his passion with greater frequency, and stronger desire.

He suffered *Judas* in his family, though he knew he would be the man that would betray him. He sharply rebuked *Peter*, as acting Satan's part in dissuading him from suffering, saying, *Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art an offence to me.* As sitting down at the last passover, he, in the text, speaks of his approaching sufferings, as matters that had drawn forth his strongest desire, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.* It is as if he had said, The sufferings I have so often spoke of, are now approaching: the hour is at hand when I shall be betrayed and crucified: this is the last passover I shall ever keep with you before I am lifted up from the earth; and therefore, I most earnestly desire it, because it is *the last*, and that which will immediately precede my death. With calmness and composure he spake to the traitor, *What thou doest, do quickly.* After his last supper with his disciples was over,

he went to the garden, whither he knew Judas would bring a band to apprehend him. And tho' he prayed, that if it were the will of God the cup might pass from him, (as suffering cannot but be grievous to sense) yet he still resigned, saying, *Thy will be done : For this cause came I unto this hour, Father glorify thy name.*

When the multitude came to seize him in the garden, he did not attempt to escape, but *went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye ? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he.* And, upon his saying so, *they went backward, and fell to the ground.* He that threw them to the ground, could have thrown them into the grave, and into hell : but he suffered them to rise, and again offered himself unto them, *saying, Whom seek ye ? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he. If therefore ye seek me, let these,* pointing to his disciples, *go their way.* He had a care of his disciples, to keep them out of cruel hands, while he willingly yielded up himself unto such.

Upon Peter's drawing his sword in his defence, and beginning to fight, he presently restrained him, saying, *Put up thy sword into its sheath ;* adding this as the reason, *The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it ?* John xviii. 8. to the end.

He could easily have rescued himself by his own power, or have had aid enough from heaven ; but he would employ neither, that the scriptures might be fulfilled, that foretold his sufferings,

Matth. xxvi. 53, 54. *Thinkest thou, saith he to Peter, who would have rescued him, that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*

It is true, nature shrinks from suffering; and from the innocent aversion our Lord had to it, he once and again prayed that if it were possible, the cup might pass from him: But this is so far from eclipsing, that it sets off his resolution, as he was mediator, so much the more, his resolution to go through the darkness and death he had before him, how terrible soever it was to nature. With what earnestness soever he prayed to be exempted from the bitter sufferings, after all, he yielded all deference and submission to his Father's pleasure: *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt,* Matth. xxvi. 39. He patiently yielded to be seized and bound, whipped and scourged, and carried his own cross, and without the least opposition was nailed to it. The forest trial remained till last: But he remembered the cause for which he came to that hour, and welcomed the feast that would lead on his death, speaking thus with ardour and affection concerning it, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer,* adding; *for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*

APPLICATION.

I. How wonderful and endearing is the love of Christ, that notwithstanding the full and tremendous view of what he was to bear as standing in
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our room, would yet engage in the work of our redemption, and steadily pursue it to the last! When the bitter cup was even at his own mouth, he declared with a zeal and earnestness never to be forgotten, but for ever to be admired, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.* This is an instance of love that hath depths in it that invite angels to stoop down to look into, and should peculiarly affect his ransomed ones, when going to the feast of love, the supper of their Lord.

Considering his original freedom and greatness, how infinitely above us, and in no deed of us, &c. What amazing condescension was it in him, thus to testify his concern for us!

He willingly offered himself of old in the council of peace about our redemption, and undertook to make satisfaction to divine justice: And after his incarnation, he always knew of, and frequently foretold his own sufferings and death. Upon the account of its preparing the way for them, he so earnestly desired to eat this passover the text speaks of, it being the last he should eat of before he suffered death.

This is wonderful, and the more so, considering the greatness of his sufferings, and the slights and neglects which he foresaw he should meet with from some that would call themselves his friends.

2. Did Christ, with his death and crucifixion before him, say to his disciples, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer?* How plain is it, that having loved his own, he loved them to the end? That the greatest
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agonies

agonies could not abate his love or make it less, and that so much satisfaction he took in their company, that he speaks with the highest pleasure of one ordinance more remaining, wherein there would be another opportunity for enjoying it before he suffered?

3. Did Christ speak with so much satisfaction of eating the passover with his disciples before he suffered? We may be sure his desire is not less of meeting his friends at his table now, at the feast he hath made for them on his body broken and blood shed, which he hath bid them to eat and drink of in remembrance of him. When he has brought them hither, he hath called them into his banquetting-house, and his banner over them will be love?

4. Did Christ often think of his death, and at last from eating and drinking with his disciples, willingly go to meet it? Let us herein learn of Christ, and looking forward to our own change approaching; go to his table to feast with him, thereby to get strength to prepare to meet the king of terrors as he did, without overwhelming fear, nay with pleasing hope, that after feasting with him here in a lower manner, we shall be called to higher entertainments in the kingdom of God above, and there live and rest, and rejoice with him for ever.

S E R M O N XVI.

JOHN VI. 67, 68.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will ye also go away ?

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

IN the latter part of this chapter, we have an excellent sermon of our blessed Lord concerning himself as *the bread of life*.

Having miraculously fed five thousand men with five loaves and two small fishes, one day, he was followed the next by the same multitude ; not because they were convinced from the miracle that he was the Messiah, and desirous to receive his doctrine for the food of their souls, but because he had fed their bodies, and, as they hoped, still would do so. This he takes notice of, and charges them with. *ver. 26. Verily, verily I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.* They followed Christ not for the refreshment of their souls, but of their bodies, and the respect they seemed to shew to him, arose only from this, that they might have their bellies filled by him.

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Upon this our Lord directs them to look higher, *ver. 27. Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life.* And he, going on to deliver several matters of doctrine that their carnal minds could not take in, instead of humbly desiring to be farther instructed by him, they first murmured at him, and then left him: they quarrelled at the doctrine, and then turned their backs upon him, the preacher of it, *ver. 66. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Of his disciples, i. e. of his more frequent hearers that were among this multitude.* These being gone, our Lord puts the question for the trial of the faith and resolution of those that abode with him: *Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

In our Lord's question we may take notice of several things.

1. What christ speaks of, *viz.* of apostacy, and of this upon the actual revolt of many that bare the name of his disciples, and had for some time followed him.

2. To whom he speaks upon this occasion, *viz.* To his chosen twelve; and it may be to some others besides them that still remained with him.

3. Of the manner of his putting this question; *viz.* with an air of concern, sufficiently expressive of his deep sense of their deplorable state who had fallen off, and of his earnest desire of
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the salvation of those who were yet with him :
Will ye also go away?

4. Of *Peter's* answer in the name of the rest, which is vehement and earnest, *Lord, to whom shall we go?* As if he should say, We have been chosen and highly favoured by thee, and are under so many obligations to thee ; we to whom thou hast peculiarly manifested thyself and admitted to communion with thee, are so infinitely obliged, that *to whom should we go?* Hereby declaring,

1. That there is no other Saviour to whom to go, and in whom to trust, but Christ.

2. That they, these disciples, could not desire, nor did they need any other : *Nay,*

3. That they could not bear the thought of forsaking and quitting their hope in him :
And,

4. That the ground of all this was, He *had the words of eternal life* : q. d. Let who will, through ignorance or prejudice, think or speak hardly of thee ; deny, disown or turn their backs upon thee, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

From the whole we may observe,

I. Their case is sad, who after a fair profession of being the followers of Christ, at length forsake him and go away.

II. Christ is tenderly concerned for the safety of his real disciples, in their abiding with him.

III. How many soever go away from Christ, true believers see and own they have the greatest reason to abide with and cleave to him, as having the words of eternal life.

I. Their

I. Their case is sad, who after a fair profession of being the followers of Christ, at length forsake him and go away.

Here two things are distinctly to be considered.

1. Many may take up a profession of being the followers of Christ, who afterward may turn apostates and go away.

2. The sadness of their case with whom it is thus.

1. Many may take up a profession of being the followers of Christ, who afterwards may prove apostates and go away.

As to this we may consider,

(1.) The matter of fact.

(2.) To what it may be owing.

(1.) The matter of fact.

Some, as it was here said of many of Christ's hearers, are disciples of him, and it may be seeming zealous ones, who after all go back : And how long soever they have followed him before this time, may now walk no more with him. How many are there that seemingly begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh ? Escape the pollution of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and afterwards are entangled thereby and overcome ? The latter end of whom is worse than their beginning.

There are too many sad and flagrant instances of this, which call us more to lament their apostacy, than to prove the truth of it. Many that once stood fair for heaven, and gave up their names to Christ, as agreeing to follow him in the way of faith and holiness thither, have first declined

declined and grown strange to him, and then quite revolted and gone back from him.

Many that are strangers to the power of godliness, may put on the form; join with the disciples of Christ, and pass for some of the number, and yet come to throw off all, so far as to make many an humble serious christian say with trembling, "If such miscarry, what will become of me?"

Judas carried the matter so fair, that the rest of the disciples questioned themselves rather than him. Upon the notice that one of them should betray their Lord, instead of suspecting him, they, one and another of them asked, *Lord, is it I?* Matth. xxvi. 22. *Simon Magus* was baptized as a true believer, and *continued* some time *with Philip*, Acts viii. 13. But afterwards discovered himself to be in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity. And, in the present degenerate age, how many affecting instances have we seen or heard, of this! How many young persons have back-slidden, after hopeful beginnings! Light hath been let into their minds; the word hath been set home to the awakening of conscience, the exciting of seemingly good affections, and the begetting of a visible change; putting them upon stopping in their former course, and settling upon another very different from it: They have prayed for a time in their closets, heard and read the word, attended on publick ordinances with seeming zeal and devotion: But, by degrees they have slackened, grown weary and cold, and sometimes fallen away to the practice of sin, and with as much liberty as they

they before spake against it. They were not far from the kingdom of God; were thought by many to belong to it; seemed to consent to be the Lord's, and to have taken his yoke upon them as his resolved followers: but after all, have taken their leaves of him; and unless sovereign grace interpose, are not likely any more to walk with him. Instead of this, they are now led captive by satan at his will: And if he bids them neglect their souls and Saviour, make a jest of religion and the professors of it, walk after the course of this world, and banish the thoughts of death, judgment and eternity, they will readily do it.

Who would think they are the same persons we once saw and knew them to be, when now become scorners of the profession they made, and instead of being the followers of Christ, are carrying it as if they never knew him? With what earnestness soever they once pretended to follow him, they are now fallen back.

So much for the matter of fact.

(2.) If we trace this to its springs, it will be found owing,

[1.] And principally to the want of the root of grace within. No wonder the profession is not steady, where the heart is not sound, nor at all engaged in it. *It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace*, Hebr. xiii. 9. But without it, it will be as unstable as water.

As without this, the soul is not vitally united to Christ, and so derives no supplies from him, in whose strength alone his members abide in him.

As corruption is left in its reign, and so the fairest profession will be no longer kept up than this may be indulged. Common light and conviction may for a time restrain, but whenever a powerful temptation is offered, the corrupt fountain breaks out; and, that sin may be freely pursued, Christ is left: and herein the apostate does not lose the grace he had (as understood of a vital principle within) but discovers, he never had any.

(2.) Entering among the followers of Christ without counting the cost, makes many go back when they meet with what they did not expect. He that can give no reason why he follows Christ, cannot be expected to hold out to the end; nor does he need any great difficulty to turn him back. He that nameth the name of Christ must depart from all iniquity; deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow him; renounce the world, and be ready to part with any thing in it that stands in opposition to Christ or competition with him; contentedly trust him, and stay for his portion in the unseen promised kingdom, consenting to follow him in his own way to it, &c. But when this is not deliberately considered, it will not be easily endured; and therefore many, after they have met with unexpected trials, have been presently offended.

(*Lastly*) In some the want of sensible joy in following Christ, or their not reaching it as soon as expected, occasions their turning their backs upon him: not presently receiving the peace they desired at their first setting out after Christ,

they will go no farther, and so turn back to their former course. But this leads us to consider,

2. The sadnefs of their case with whom it is thus:

(1.) In general their case is worse than if they had never made a profession of Christ, 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. *For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.*

The latter end is worse with them than the beginning: it may be said to be so now,

(1.) As the Holy Spirit is grieved, and, it may be, is retired, and so their recovery is more doubtful. They have done despight to the Spirit of grace, by opposing the blessed design of his striving with them, breaking from under his hand, and turning their backs on him from whom he came.

(2.) As they have put themselves out of the way in which he is wont to vouchsafe his influence, and it cannot be expected that it should follow them.

(3.) As their guilt is greater, and their time nearer to an end, and all their hopes depend upon the continuance of that life which guilt calls so loud to justice to cut off. Time can never be

more necessary to any, to work out their salvation in, than to these ; and yet, none can be in greater danger of coming to the end of time, before their work is done.

[4.] As satan has got faster hold of them. When he returns to his house which for a time he hath left, it is said, he brings with him seven spirits worse than himself, and so returns with a fierceness and resolution, always to dwell there. They who have escaped, in profession, the servitude of satan, and have seemed to cleave to a new and better Master, Christ ; upon their revolt from Christ, they are again seized by that cruel tyrant, who will do all he can to prevent all future escape from him, and to make them captives for ever. Thus at present, their case is worse than if they had never made a profession of Christ.

(2.) As their case is now worse than it was in the beginning ; so, by forsaking of Christ they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life, and out of the way to heaven. When there is but one only name under heaven given among men whereby they must be saved, how fearful is their state who turn their backs upon it ; as there is a day a coming when *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, 2 Thes. i. 7.*

Let us view the case of apostates (*in*) and (*after*) that day.

(1.) *In*

(1.) *In it.* Under what shame and contempt will apostates fall ! as convicted,

[1.] Of vile hypocrisy. Their revolting from Christ is proof sufficient that they never were his disciples indeed, but in their hearts preferred something else before him, all the while they pretended devotedness to him : And so their profession was no other than a solemn lie, a saying, they were christians, when they were not, but of the synagogue of satan.

[2.] Of base ingratitude ; in that they turned their backs on one that never deserved it, but deserved the contrary, as their great benefactor and best friend, doing them good and not evil all their days : One who shewed so tender a concern for their preservation in this world, and so earnest a desire of their blessedness in another ; and all to win them to him, and engage them to abide with him, but they would not.

[3.] Of the greatest treachery and unfaithfulness ; in that after they had entered themselves among the disciples of Christ, and engaged to follow and cleave to him, living and dying, they break the most solemn bonds they have brought their souls under, and against all that they have said, vowed, and sworn to the contrary, they totally and finally forsake him and go away. Now what shame must be the attendant of such complicated wickedness when brought to light ?

[4.] Of the most unaccountable folly ; in that they forsake Christ and his ways, which were ways of peace, and would have led to heaven ; and turn to the ways of sin, though plainly told

that they were all deceit in the beginning, and death in the end. When become sad witnesses themselves of the truth of this, they cannot hear or think of their undoing choice, but with tormentful shame. And how will their confusion be increased, as at the same time they will fall under the contempt of Christ! This is his just and awful threatening, *Mark viii. 38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.* When seated on his high tribunal to render unto every man according to his works, how terrible must it be to fall under his frowns and displeased eye! Their case will be sad in that day.

(2.) How will it be *after it*?

They cannot expect an injured Saviour should take them with him to heaven, who were weary of him upon earth; and there remaineth no other place but hell: And the hottest place there, is prepared for apostates, as it is deserved by them. These are trees that are twice dead: and when they are plucked up by the roots, and cast into the fire, no wonder if their punishment be proportionable to their guilt. Wilful forsakers of Christ, after they have received the knowledge of the truth, are plainly told, *There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries,* Heb. x. 26, 27.

The wrath that awaits all such is inexpressibly dreadful, and yet most just: and that it is so,

so, appeal is made to all that duly consider the crying provocation that leads it on, *Heb. x. 28, 29. He that despised Moses's law died without mercy, &c. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, &c?* Thus, if any man draws back, he does it to his own perdition.

So much for the first observation, *viz.* Their case is sad who after a fair profession of their being the followers of Christ, at length forsake him and go away?

I now go on to the

II^d Thing observed, *viz.* That Christ is tenderly concerned for the safety of his real disciples in their abiding with him.

When many nominal disciples revolt and walk no more with him, with what compassion and regard doth he bespeak these, *Will ye also go away?* He is solicitous for their safety, and hath their happiness at heart.

Here it will be necessary to shew,

1. How Christ's concern for his real followers appears.

2. From whence it proceeds.

1. How our blessed Lord discovers his concern for the safety of his real followers.

The Apostle supposes all christians acquainted with this, as what is, and ought to be their delightful meditation, *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c. 2 Cor. viii. 9.* He pitied us in our fallen state, and came from heaven to earth, to seek and to save such as were lost: He freely assumed our nature to become

a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour : He takes such as the Father hath given him into a special union and relation to him ; and then is not ashamed to call them brethren, but loves, and cares, and provides for them as such. Whilst he was on earth, how many kind expressions do we meet with of his affection for them, which continued to the death ? And his love is not abated now since he is gone to heaven. As the time drew nigh that he was to depart from hence, how much soever he had to mind, it is recorded for their comfort, *John xiii. 1. Having loved his own, which were in the world, he loved them unto the end*, and had his thoughts taken up about the safety and comfort of their state below, more than about the glory he was going to. Indeed, having finished the work that was given him to do, he takes a view of the glory that was to be his reward, and puts in his claim to it, *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine ownself, with the glory which I had before the world was* : But yet does not make so much haste to remove, as to be unmindful of them whom he should leave behind ; *John xvii. 11. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own Name, those whom thou hast given me.* i. e. Though I am about to remove, and shall not be any more in the world as before ; yet whilst they are in the world, I cannot but pity and pray for them, and with compassion commit them into thy hand.

Nor was he satisfied in putting up this single request for them, but farther strengthens and repeats it, that their preservation may be sure: *ver. 12. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy Name, i. e. and I am secure of thy power and grace to do it still, and know their need of it.* As there are valuable designs to be served by their continuance on earth, be that longer or shorter as thou pleasest, *I pray, not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.* These things our blessed Lord spake in the world, that his disciples might have their joy fulfilled in themselves, from assurance of the concern he had for them. And the same affection that he discovered to the death, being risen and ascended, he hath carried with him to the throne above, and shewed it by appearing in the presence of God for them.

Many are the snares and temptations, dangers and difficulties to which believers are here exposed, but their case is well known and regarded by their compassionate Lord: *For we have not, saith the Apostle, an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, Heb. iv. 15.* How far soever he is above us, he has not cast off the care of us: He wears the names of his friends, of every one of them, on his heart, and is the same as to tenderness and compassion, both in his state of humiliation, and of glory. His love, like his life, is for ever: His concern for his people will never be over, till they are brought to be with him, above all danger, and fear, and complaint for ever.

This being the concern Christ discovers for his sincere followers,

2. We

2. We are to consider from whence it proceeds. And this proceeds from their being ransomed by him, entrusted with him, his special love for them, his knowledge of the misery to which apostacy tends, and of the greatness of the salvation they are capable of, and, by adhering to him, shall assuredly reach.

(1.) Christ is concerned for his followers, as they are ransomed by him, and at the dearest rate. As the purchase of his blood, they are the objects of his care. He was incarnate for their sakes, and died for their sins: and being redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot, no wonder he has their safety at heart, *1 Pet. i. 18.*

It may seem strange that the Lord of glory should speak, and often, with so much respect of any of *Adam's* apostate race; that his eye should be upon them, his providence engaged for them, his Spirit sent forth to dwell in them, and the holy angels charged to attend them; that so many calls and counsels, warnings and helps should be given them, to prevent their miscarrying in their way to heaven, &c. But this is one ground of all, His blood was shed for those about whom he shews this concern, and it was too precious to be shed in vain. *Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, Ephes. v. 25.* He did so who was the eternal Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person: he stooped to this, who was in the form of God,
and

and thought it no robbery to be equal with him: he that was rich, became poor, to the enriching of souls that were ready to perish, but whom he would thus recover and save. He laid down his life for the sheep, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, to redeem them from wrath who were liable to it, and bring them to everlasting glory. This he underwent in the freest manner, and with the greatest willingness; and having proclaimed the worth of souls by dying for them, he hath the tenderest regard to them.

(2.) Christ is tenderly concerned for his real disciples, as being intrusted with them by his Father, and accountable to him. Our Lord often speaks of a number given him by the Father. And it was, as commissioned by him, that he came into the world to ransom them by his blood, recover them by his grace, keep them from falling back, and falling away, till, as the captain of their salvation, he had brought them safe to glory. *John vi. 38, 39. I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.* Faithfulness to his Father engages Christ's concern for every believer.

When he was going to leave this world, he appeals to his Father, as to his faithfulness in discharging the mighty trust about every one given him to be saved, *While I was with them*
in

in the world, I kept them in thy name : those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition. And now when he is in heaven, he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Under a sense of the trust committed to him, he declares, Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out, nor suffer to perish, nor to be plucked out of my hand, *John vi. 37. x. 28.* His faithfulness will never fail, nor his power be overcome. Having readily obeyed his Father's will, in laying down his life for the recovery of those that were designed for heaven, he cannot be unconcerned about the preservation of any of them, when they are actually brought into his kingdom.

(3.) Christ's real disciples stand in a peculiar relation to him, not only as servants and friends, but, by a mystical union, as members of his body : and so, he being their head for government and influence, they can never be forgotten or neglected by him. Upon the revolt of nominal disciples from him, he cannot but turn and shew his regard to his real ones, as standing thus nearly related to him.

(4.) He has moreover a special love for them : a love that brought him from heaven to earth, to seek and to save them when lost ; a love that led him calmly as a lamb to the slaughter, to lay down his life for them ; a love that washed them in his blood, sanctified them by his Spirit, covered them with his righteousness, took them into his family, and made them heirs of his kingdom,

dom, and put them in the way to it. And, as this his gracious love is unchangeable and everlasting, he will never suffer any of the happy objects of it totally and finally to go away from him.

(5.) Christ is concerned for the safety of such, as knowing the misery to which apostacy tends. He sees the burning lake in which such as draw back will justly have the deepest place, where there is nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

(6.) On the other hand, he knows the great salvation they are capable of, the blessedness laid up and prepared for them; to which they can only arrive by abiding in him.

They are some of the grounds of our Lord's concern for his sincere followers.

There was a

III^d Observation, *viz.* That how many soever go away from Christ, true believers see and own they have the greatest reason to cleave to him, as having the words of eternal life.

Here I might shew,

1. That believers are sensible, they have none but Christ to whom to go. This they learnt when first taught of God to come to him, and the conviction will never wear off.

2. That they dread the thoughts of going away; considering the sin and folly involved in it, the aggravated misery it would draw after it, the injustice of going away after the dedication they have made of themselves to Christ, the ingratitude of doing so, after all the experience they have had of him, and that they can ne-

ver answer it to him, but must be filled with the greatest confusion in the day of his appearing.

3. How many soever revolt from Christ, sincere believers will, and ought to cleave to him still: and they own they have the greatest reason to do so:

(1.) To repair, as much as in them lies, the dishonour cast upon him, and his ways, by such as leave him, and to witness for him, that he never gave any a just occasion to do so.

(2.) To shew that their choice of Christ and faith in him, is not built on what others say of him, but upon what they have seen and found in him, and heard and received from him. This is the reason *Peter* gives in the name of the rest, why they could not admit the thought of a change, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

APPLICATION.

1. How desireable is a special relation to Christ, as all such shall be kept by him thro' faith unto salvation!

2. Let such as make a fair profession of Christ in such a day of defection as ours, look upon themselves concerned to double their watch. And let me say to you all,

1. Look to the ground on which your profession is taken up.

2. Consider the danger and misery of going away, and tremble at the thought.

3. Beg

3. Beg of God to keep you, and pray as those that know the treachery of your own hearts, that unless you are kept by a better power than your own, you are lost.

Lastly, Keep that eternal life in view of which Christ hath the words; and then meet every difficulty, and bear every trial, as those that know that the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed.

S E R M O N XVII.

JOHN XII. 20, 21.

And there were certain Greeks among them, that came up to worship at the feast :

The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

THE Greeks or Gentiles here spoken of, are supposed to have dwelt about Tyre and Sidon, near enough to the Galileans to have converse with them ; and so might be acquainted with Philip, who was of Bethsaida of Galilee, to whom they applied, as in the text, *Sir, we would see Jesus.*

With what design they desired this, whether only to gratify their curiosity, or for better ends, is not said : but the passage may give rise to what may be of use to ourselves.

Accordingly, Two enquiries may be made upon our reading it.

I. By whom among ourselves these same words of desire may be uttered, *We would see Jesus.*

II. What may be implied in them, according to the sense of the several sorts of men or wishers,

wishers, that may utter and repeat them after these *Greeks*?

I. By whom among ourselves these same words may be uttered?

Now, three sorts may thus express themselves, *We would see Jesus*.

1. Such as are yet strangers to him, and who after this may continue so, and live and die in sin and unbelief, may utter them. Many may say, *We would see Jesus*, and yet never seek heartily to get an interest in him: they would have a Saviour, but will perish rather than accept him like one: they would go to heaven, and would seemingly bid fair for it at first; but after they see the difficulty of the way, they will rather stop where they are, and at last sink into eternal perdition, than enter into it, and patiently walk through it. Hence our Lord exhorts to *strive to enter in at the strait gate*; adding, by way of motive, *for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*, Luke xiii. 24.

2. You may take the persons speaking thus to be such, who, tho' yet out of Christ, are under the Spirit's preparatory work to lead them to a vital union and fellowship with him: such into whose souls the Spirit is come as a convincer, in order to their conversion; opening their eyes and hearts so far, by the affecting discoveries of sin and misery, as to make them cry out for a sight of Christ, as a dying man for a physician, a condemned man for a pardon, or a drowning man for a plank, by which he may escape be-

ing swallowed up by the tempestuous and swelling ocean.

This was the case of *Peter's* hearers, *Acts* ii. 37. They, when pricked at their hearts, said unto him, and to the rest of the apostles, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* And this was the case of the awakened jailor, *Acts* xvi. 30. When he came trembling, and fell down before *Paul and Silas*, and said, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*

The impressions made on both these, issued well: for of the effects of the first, it is said, *The same day there were added unto them*, i. e. the church, *about three thousand souls*: and the latter, the jailor, having faith in Christ preached to him as the way to salvation, was made a monument of mercy, *and was baptized, and all his, straightway*. The weary and heavy laden Christ calls to him for their obtaining ease and rest; and such as these, under a lively sense of their need of him, we may conceive of, as uttering themselves as in the text, *We would see Jesus*.

3. Those may thus speak who are already made partakers of Christ, and stand in a special relation to him. True believers have not yet apprehended concerning Christ all that they desire, and are encouraged to expect: but as to what is wanting, they depend upon him for receiving it. The life they live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God; and the heaven they are waiting for, is a place where they are to be present *with him, where he is*: and as going up towards it, they find frequent occasion to join in this desire, *We would see Jesus*.

This

This distinction of persons concerned, you are to keep in mind, while we consider,

II. What may be implied in these words according to the mind of the several sorts of wishers, who may express and repeat them after these *Greeks*?

The desire of each we shall endeavour to open, both as to the object they desire to see, and the nature of the act, or of their desire to see this object.

1. To begin with such as are yet strangers to Christ, and who after such an enquiry, may still, for all that, remain finally in a natural state, and never get a special interest in him.

It is not easy to distinguish between such as by the preparatory work of the Spirit convincing them of sin, are converted and pass into a state of grace, and such as may be brought seemingly near the kingdom of God, and yet after all miscarry and come to nothing: but thus much seems plain, that when any say, *We would see Jesus*, who after it never pass into the number of his living and true members, their desire, as to the object of it, may be said to be at best but *carnal and confused*.

(1.) Their desire is *carnal*, and sometimes it is so very carnal and low, as to respect Jesus only as Man, and to have regard only to his external form, and extraordinary outward actions: as for example, How he appeared among men, and what uncommon things he could do, &c.

Thus the *Jews* desired to see the *Messiah promised*, but figured to themselves a quite different person, and one sent for quite different purposes

than God designed, and than lost sinners needed him to be that was come into the world for their salvation. They had little or no sense of their spiritual misery, as sinful, and liable thereby to the wrath of God: so liable that nothing they could do or suffer themselves, could avail to deliver them from this state and danger; and that therefore, for help in this case, they were to look for a sufficient and suitable Saviour, and to desire to see him. But instead of such a Saviour as this, they expected their Saviour to be a temporal prince, appearing with grandeur and power to subdue the nations about them, and to set them up to be the chief among the nations; and then after he had thus exalted them, to reign over them as their king. When therefore he came in a mean and humble manner, for spiritual, and not worldly ends, their disappointed expectations turned into that contempt and rage against him, which pursued him to his death upon a cross.

It was foretold concerning him, that he would have *no form or comeliness* in him, *i. e.* no such as they looked for; and accordingly the prophet thus goes on, *When we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him: he is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him: he was despised, and we esteemed him not,* Is. liii. 2, 3. And how exactly was this answered in the Jews conduct and carriage? He came unto his own, and his own received him not: his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign

reign over us. How raised and earnest soever their expectations and desires of the Messiah were about the time of Christ's coming, they were raised from a carnal and mistaken notion of him, which when he did not answer, they loudly cried : *Crucify him, Crucify him*, and desisted not, till they saw it done.

Herod, it is said, was desirous of a long season to see Jesus, and was glad when he had the opportunity : but what was it for ? Why for the hope of seeing some miracle done by him ; in which not being humoured, he, and his men of war set him at nought.

Sinners may still be desirous *to see Jesus*, for purposes as low as these : for example, to gratify their curiosity in beholding his visage, or hearing his voice, or touching his garment, or having him near to them to supply their corporal necessities, heal their diseases, and better their circumstances in the present world : and so, in what they would see of and from him, their apprehensions are carnal.

(2.) As to any thing relating to their souls and another world, their apprehensions and desires are very *confused*.

In their saying, *We would see Jesus*, their regards do not reach beyond the body and the present world ; and if we ask them, what they would have ? They are at a loss, having either no meaning, or one they scarce know how without shame to declare. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,* 1 Cor. ii.

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14. The gospel holds forth *Christ crucified*, as the only all-sufficient Saviour : but to the *Jews*, he is a stumbling-block, and to the *Greeks*, foolishness. It is to them that are called, and only to them, that he is the wisdom of God, and the power of God, 1 *Cor.* i. 24.

The sinners, of whom we are speaking, feel not their own wants and burdens ; are insensible of their guilt and vileness, and of their danger from both : and hence are as far from discerning the beauty and worth of Jesus, for which he should be desired, as one that is born blind, is from being taken with the most amiable colour, of which he has no notion at all.

You know, when our Lord put the question to his disciples, *Whom say ye that I am ?* Peter answered, *Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God :* upon which our Lord replied, *Blessed art thou Simon Barjona : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven,* Matthew xvi. 17. No man can say, *Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,* 1 *Cor.* xii. 3. His office and work, the salvation carried on in his Name, and to be expected from his hand, is spiritual ; and so are all the *mysteries* of him ; of which the knowledge of a natural man, if he has any, may be said to be as none at all.

2. We may consider the desire of this sort as to the act of it, when they say, *We would see Jesus.*

And herein it may have a resemblance to that which the Spirit works in those that are effectually called, and brought home to Christ :
and

and hence, after some pangs felt, they may be ready to conclude, that they have passed through the new birth, and are safe; when all the while they remain in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, and strangers to a Saviour, how often soever they may utter the desire, *We would see Jesus.*

The desire of such, when carried farthest, may have three things said of it, denoting its defect: for,

(1.) It is *partial*, and not extending to all that Christ hath purchased, and is to be to those, and do for those whom he is appointed to save. They may be in a sort willing of his blood to pardon, but not of his Spirit to purify; willing to be saved from wrath by him, but cannot heartily consent to be subject to him.

(2.) Their desire, at best, is not *predominant*. Whatever inclination they have to Christ, they have a stronger and more prevalent one to something else. They would have Christ and the world, Christ, and the gratification of self, in this or the other instance, contrary to his interest and will: and if they cannot have both, they will soon shew that the latter hath the greatest room in their hearts, for the sake of which, they will break with him, and break off from him.

(3.) It is not of *powerful* and *abiding influence*, shewing itself in vigorous, restless endeavours after a Saviour. They faintly wish and say, They would have what they own they want, but take little pains to secure what they seem to long for: and thus the desire of the

lothful killeth him ; for his hands refuse to labour, *Prov. xxi. 25.*

Such a desire as this may take its rise,

(1.) From something external. I will suppose it may be from the report of others concerning Christ, raising a superficial esteem of him, from what he is said to have done and suffered, obtained, and is ready to give out to sinners ; though they yet feel not their own particular need of him, or have but low thoughts of the importance of it with reference to themselves.

(2.) From the common work of the Spirit, as impressing conviction within them under the word preached, or under some afflictive providences, or at the apprehension of approaching death. They may hence have some serious thoughts of the danger of their present state, and from it be filled with uneasiness and horror ; which may make them wish, and it may be with great earnestness, that they had not so long made light of Christ, and that they now had an interest in him : and in their present anguish, they may be led to say, they would give all the world to obtain such an interest, and if it shall please God to try them longer, this above all things they would look after, and never be at rest till they had made it sure. But not cherishing such convictions as these, or seeking ease in something short of Christ, the Spirit is grieved and retires ; the pang goes over with that which occasioned it, and the result is, Many such settle in stupidity, or in a false peace, and so perish
without

without an interest in *that Jesus*, whom they wish to see.

So much for the first sort.

2. The second sort is made up of those, who, though they are yet out of Christ, are under the Spirit's influence leading them to him, and in whom God will not suffer his work to die.

In these, two things deserve our notice, *namely*,

First, What of Jesus they desire to see: and, *Secondly*, What sort of desire this is?

First, What it is these have upon their hearts, and in their desires, when saying, *We would see Jesus*. And this in general is, that they may see themselves to *be of God in him*, and so be admitted to share in his salvation: and in particular, that they may see their sins are pardoned through his blood: that their spots are covered, and deformities hid; their nature and state changed: that they may see they shall be delivered from hell, and the wrath to come, and restored to the favour of God, and acceptance with him: that they may be rescued from the tyranny of Satan, and the dominion of sin, and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God; to serve, and please, and walk with him here; and in the way of faith and holiness, pass on to the blissful enjoyment of him in heaven.

You may read their sense in the apostle's words, *Philip. iii. 8.* with a little variation. *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for, for him I am come to a point, that I*
would

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would gladly suffer the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and such as these are some of the lost number that are sensible they need his salvation, and must perish without it: therefore they desire, they may be of God in Christ Jesus, and that *he may be made of God to them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption*; that so there may be joy in heaven, that they are brought into the way to it, and that in that joy, (when having their salvation perfected) they may bear their part to all eternity.

This is what awakened sinners mean, when they say, *We would see Jesus.*

2. As to what sort of a desire this is. It is such as is not to be satisfied with any thing else; and accordingly we find it represented in scripture by *hunger and thirst*, Matthew v. 6. It is something answering to the keenest appetites of nature. *Isaiah lv. 1. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, &c.* John vii. 37. *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.* Rev. xxii. 17. *And let him that is athirst come.*

(1.) It is a desire, I say, like thirst, *i. e.* one eager and vehement; and so fills the soul where it is with pain, which will discover itself in cries to God, complaints to men, and enquiries of both, *What shall we do? Whither shall we go? What course shall we take?* Rachel cries out, Give me children, or else I die: and the awakened sinner is in the same strain, Let me have Christ, and an interest in him, or I cannot live.

(2.) It is a desire under which the poor sinner betakes himself to the use of all appointed means, with a diligence and seriousness he never discovered before; and proposes this as his aim in all, to obtain an *interest in Christ*. For this, he fervently prays, as both Christ himself, and faith to receive him, are the free gifts of God: For this he attends the word preached, and redeems all opportunities of doing so, as faith comes by hearing: For this, he searcheth the scriptures, meditates alone, and confers with others; and pursues this one thing through all, *namely*, to secure an interest in Christ.

(3.) It is a desire that can admit of no rest, but in the thing desired. A vehement thirst determines those in whom it is, to one thing, *namely*, to drink: and to offer them any thing else, is not to assuage their appetite, but to enrage it by the disappointment. Tender to one parched and ready to perish for thirst, the best attire, heaps of gold and silver, all sorts of jewels, and what riches and ornament you will, still he will cry with *Samson*, when he was in distress, for want of water, *And now shall I die for thirst?* How far are these from reaching my case, and answering my exigence?

Something like this is the language of a soul making out after a Saviour: Tell him of money, or honour, or whatever accommodations you can name; that this or the other thing he has, or may have, and call for, &c. He answers with a piercing look and tone, "*They will not do*. What satisfaction or comfort, content or ease, can be had or expected in any of these, whilst I go
" *christless?*

“christless? What can supply his place, or relieve my distress, besides himself? Who can be to me, or do for me, what Christ can be and do, and what I hope he will do? And in this hope I am enquiring after him. Let others turn to what they please, as for me, *None but Christ, None but Christ.*” Such an one had rather have Christ without any thing else, than all the world, and want an interest in him.

A slight desire may carry a sinner a little way in looking out after a Saviour, in a fit or pang: but as that pang wears off, something else is put in his stead, with which the deceived creature takes up, and for which he takes his leave of Christ, as *Orpah* did of *Naomi*, and follows him no further. But desire wrought in effectual calling, puts the sinner upon following Christ still, pressing after him still; resolving to reach an interest in him, or die in the pursuit.

(4.) It is a desire that would presently be satisfied. Every day to such as are under it, seems long: They are seeking after that which they absolutely want, and without which they are undone; but in the securing of it made for ever. They would not be impatient, so as either to give over seeking, or to turn out of God’s way: But yet they are willing presently to see *Jesus*, and they find an uneasiness under the thought of living a moment longer without him.

Now such a desire is owing to the operation of the Holy Spirit: And his ordinary way of producing it is,

[1.] By

[1.] By giving the sinner a sight and sense of sin, and of the wrath of God due to it, and so of the deplorable condition he is in by nature. It is the Spirit's work to convince of sin, *John* xvi. 8. Which he does by setting before the sinner's eyes the book of the law in its spirituality and extent, bidding him compare his heart and life with it. And from hence he lets him see, how far short he has come of what the law requires, and in how many thousand instances he has ventured to do what it forbids: To what a dreadful number his transgressions have risen, and that all of them are but branches from that root of bitterness, that corruption that came into the world with him.

This being the case, the sinner besides being made sensible he is as guilty and polluted, is made to apprehend his danger, and sees that all the while he has been sinning against God, he has been treasuring up to himself wrath against the day of wrath: for the wages of sin is such a death as includeth all that is dreadful; and this he knows is what he is every moment liable to, and may righteously be made to feel.

Conscience is awakened to apply and set home the charge, telling the sinner, Thou art the man, Thus hast thou done, and this is the sentence, thou art under, *The soul that sins shall die*: Upon which a just concern is impressed, and fear and horror fill his soul, which puts him upon meditating an escape.

[2.] The Spirit produceth this desire in the sinner, by shewing him his utter insufficiency for his own recovery from his sinful and dangerous state.

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state. It is an infinite God that is offended, who insists upon satisfaction, and one proportionable to the offence: which nothing that meer creatures can do or suffer can ever amount to. Without blood there is no remission; and the blood of bulls and goats is insignificant to make atonement for sin, and merit pardon and peace. However,

[3.] The Spirit doth it, by opening the sinner's eyes in his deepest distress, to see that yet there is hope. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish but have everlasting life:* And, in appointing his Son in our nature, to be our Saviour, God the Father hath laid help upon one that is mighty to save: And this his Son, our Saviour, hath done and suffered, all that he was appointed to do and suffer, and is accepted of God in it, which is proved by his resurrection from the dead. And as he died as a full propitiation for sin, he ever liveth to make intercession for sinners; and so is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Though Christ, and he alone is the only Saviour, he is an all-sufficient one.

[4.] This Spirit abundantly satisfies the sinner, that Christ is willing, as well as able to save. There is no room nor reason to doubt of this: as he hath testified his love at the dearest rate, by laying down his life, and as he, in the most moving and endearing manner, invites lost sinners to come to him: declaring, *That him that cometh to him, he will in no wise cast out,* John vi. 37.

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From hence the drooping soul begins to revive, and admit a supporting hope, that how guilty soever he is, the blood of Jesus can cleanse him from all his sins; that how unworthy soever he is in himself, yet through him he may be made acceptable: How indigent soever he is in himself, yet through and from him he may be supplied: How weak soever, the grace given through and from him, will be sufficient for him: In a word, how far gone soever by himself, as alone, yet in and by him he may be recovered, healed and saved.

Such grounds of hopes do at the same time, raise, encourage and feed desire to *see Jesus*; and this sight is followed with endeavours after him, such as will rest in nothing but a vital union to him.

For this they long; after this they pant and pray, with groanings too big for words to express, and which cannot be well understood by any, but those in whose breasts such a desire has been kindled. Having discovered the pearl of price, they can have no peace in themselves, till they have made it their own. Now, after this, it is Christ that is sought in every place, and from ordinance to ordinance. They no longer attend these merely to satisfy an awakened and terrified conscience, or from secular views; but to get acquaintance with Christ, and to secure a full interest in him: and whatever is offered them short of this, it is all rejected. And this will be their language, expressive of their inward sense, *We would see Jesus, and be found in him*, not having on our own righteousness, &c. No hungry

hungry man hath a keener appetite for food, nor thirsty man a more vehement desire of drink, nor covetous man a greater desire of money, nor ambitious man of honour, than such as these have for Jesus Christ and an interest in him.

For this they give up every sin, renounce the dearest lust, and are prepared to do so as to all the offers the world can make to them instead of a Saviour, looking upon him as infinitely better. Nothing is so dear to them, as to stand in competition with him, in whom their life and hope are bound up; without whom nothing can save them from being miserable, and in whom they cannot but expect to be happy for time and eternity.

These are the grounds from whence, under the influence of the Spirit, arises their desire of *seeing Jesus*, who are entering into the number of his living members.

3. There is yet a third sort, and among whom, I desire to leave you, *viz.* Such as have a special interest in Jesus the only and all-sufficient Saviour, and yet still continue to desire to see him: *We would see Jesus.*

And here, what I have to do, is to tell you,

(1.) What their desire is carried out after: And then,

(2.) To shew you some of the grounds of it.

(1.) To shew you what their desire is carried out after in saying, *We would see Jesus.*

You

You may be sure, *It is not to see him any more in an humbled state*, to repeat his obedience and sufferings, as if he had not fulfilled all righteousness. He hath once suffered for sin, and that is enough; as by once offering up of himself, he hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified, and obtained eternal redemption for us.

In this there is a difference between believers before Christ's coming, and those since. The former might say, *We would see Jesus*, and often did; and one thing that filled their desires was, that he might appear, and accomplish the great work of their and our redemption. For this end, our Lord declares, *Abraham rejoiced to see his Day, and he saw it, and was glad*, John viii. 56. He saw it but afar off, and died with the rest of the *Old Testament* worthies, in the faith that God would perform the mercy promised to the fathers: Which with submission to the will of God, they were all of them desirous to see, as soon as he pleased. And with reference to this among other things, our Lord lets his apostles know their privilege, who actually saw him. Mat. xiii. 16, 17. *But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them: and to hear these things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

We read of such as *looked for redemption in Jerusalem*, Luke ii. 38. and waited for the consolation of *Israel*, by the coming of Christ in the flesh: And to *Simeon*, as one of that num-

ber, it was revealed by the Holy Ghost, *that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.* And accordingly he came by the Spirit into the temple, at the time when the child was brought thither ; and taking him up in his arms he brake forth into a rapture, saying, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation : &c.*

And during Christ's abode upon earth, such an ocular sight of him may well be supposed to be the desire of them that believed on him. And it was of special moment to the Apostles when preaching him to others, that they might be able to say in the most literal sense, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life, declare we unto you,* 1 John i. 1---3.

It is said to be one of the three things that St. *Austin* wished to have seen, *Christ in the flesh.* But saith the Apostle, *Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now, henceforth know we him (so) no more,* 2. Cor. v. 16.

Multitudes saw Christ with their bodily eyes, that had no interest in him, and so died in sin : And his real disciples that lived in the days of his flesh, became intitled to the salvation which he came to purchase, not as beholding him dwelling among them, but as believing on him : And therefore to this it is, that blessedness is annexed by Christ himself, *John xx. 29. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

With reference therefore to believers since Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, in their saying, *We would see Jesus*, when they speak becoming their character, their meaning is, that they desire that they may have a clear and comfortable evidence of their interest in him, so as to be able to say with the church, *My Beloved is mine, and I am his*: That they may of his fulness all of them receive, and grace for grace; and so have larger communications of life, and strength and influence from him: That they may be more conformed unto him, and by the endearing discoveries and tastes of his love as drawing forth their own, may be let into that communion with him, that may be the beginning of heaven; and so be prepared for his second coming, when to those that look for him, he will appear the second time without sin, to their compleat salvation.

This is what they ultimately direct their desire to, even that happy time when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe; when, with all the children of the kingdom, they shall see him as he is, be made like him, and appear with him in glory, and be with him in triumph in the heavenly kingdom, there to remain for ever with him their Lord.

This is what believers are to be conceived to have at heart in their saying, *We would see Jesus*.

They that know most of Christ, and have received most from him, are desirous of more, and such a desire will have place in their souls;

till they come to heaven. They will never sit down satisfied, and say they have enough ; enough of grace, enough of comfort, till they have apprehended all that for which they are apprehended of Christ Jesus, their Lord and Redemer.

Having thus seen what the desires of those of this last sort are carried out after :

(2.) We were to shew you some of the grounds of this their desire.

These are various according to various circumstances they may be in, while saying, *We would see Jesus.*

[1.] They may have sometimes lost that communion with Christ, that endearing intercourse between him and their souls which they once experienced. And I need not prove to the friends of Christ, that this is a possible case. There is such a thing as his withdrawing from them ; sometimes for trial, and sometimes for a correction of their sloth and unbecoming carriage towards him. Hence the church complained, *My Beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone : She sought him but could not find him ; she called him, but he gave her no answer, Cant. v. 6.* She would fain have recovered his lost company, and have seen again his blessed face, and heard his sweet and delightful voice : And to recover it see what industry she used, *Cant. iii. 2, 5, 6, 7, 8.*

Now such a desire ariseth in those that have lost sensible communion with Christ.

(1.) From a remembrance of the happiness of having such communion with him. *He hath formerly,* may such as want his presence say,
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brought

brought me into his banqueting house, and his banner over me then was love : I sate down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste ; but now I find him not, see him not as formerly, &c.

(2.) From a quick sense of the sad change made by his withdrawment ; which is the more affecting, as having known what the comfort of communion with him means.

(3. From a concern for his honour, lest others should think the worse of Christ and his service, or be discouraged from seeking after him, by the dejection they cannot but discover in them during his absence. This makes them cry out, O that it were with me as in the months that are past ! O restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and comfort me with thy free Spirit !

[2.] You may consider believers speaking thus, *We would see Jesus*, as now enjoying communion with him ; and so it hath respect to its continuance. And for their desiring of this, they think they have reason, as knowing what they went through before they reached it. Looking back to their affliction and misery, the wormwood and the gall, their soul hath them still in remembrance ; and hence are excited humbly to beg, that as the day-spring from on high hath visited them, and as the sun of righteousness is risen upon them, they may dwell in his reviving light, and no more be turned back into the horrible darkness and dungeon they were in before.

[3.] You may conceive these when saying *We would see Jesus*, to mean the *improvement* of their

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communion with him so happily begun. And this they cannot but desire :

(1.) That they may have clearer evidence that in the glory to which he is ascended he is not unmindful of his servants that are walking after him, but graciously concerned for their peace and joy. This will endear him to them themselves, and give them occasion, from their own experience, to recommend him to others

(2.) That the more of heaven there is here vouchsafed, the less interruption they may have in the work of preparation for it, the delightful work of thanksgiving and praise ; and that even in their way to *Sion* their songs may be more sweet, as they approach nearer and nearer to it, and not be so frequently broken off to give room for sighs and groans.

[4.] You may consider believers when saying, *We would see Jesus*, as looking up after him to heaven, and the blessedness summed up in being with him there.

And this they ultimately desire for these reasons, *viz.* (1.) That between their Beloved and them, there may be never any more the shadow of a distance. And, (2.) That in their salvation as perfected, Christ may see of the travel of his soul to his perfect satisfaction : And that feeling themselves happy in being with him, and beholding his glory, they may join with all the children of the kingdom in attributing blessing and honour, and glory, and power to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.

I have

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I have been so long in the doctrinal part, that I must desire you to pursue the application between God and your own souls : Only a word or two I shall add for your help.

APPLICATION.

1. May there be some that remain utter strangers to the only Saviour, and finally perish, after a professed desire of acquaintance with him ? Then how certainly are those tending to misery, who make no enquiries after him at all, but leave it to who will to say, *We would see Jesus ?* If men feel no uneasiness without him, and make light of him, and of all the blessings purchased by him, whatever dreams they may have of their own peace and safety, the scripture speaks of their perdition, as unavoidable ; for how shall they escape who neglect so great salvation ?

2. Rest not satisfied with any desires of *seeing Jesus*, that may be found in those, who after all may die without a saving interest in him. In saying you *see Jesus*, take notice from whence your desire springs, and how it works.

Does it arise from a superficial apprehension, that as *sinners*, you have something to do with a Saviour, but you do not well know what ? and so are enquiring after him with a coldness and indifference answerable to its cause, and which is never like to reach any valuable end ? Or are you enquiring after Jesus from a deep sense of your need of him, that, as to your souls and eternity, you are lost and undone without him ; and that he, and he only, can relieve and save you ? And accordingly are you pursuing

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suing the enquiry, with a restlessness and resolution, never to take up with any thing in his room? When it is thus, you may hear his own words, as directed to you, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Matth. xi. 28.

3. Be thankful for what of Jesus you have seen, and be desirous of more. Improve all the tokens of his love, and in that love, long for his return from heaven; and then though *it doth not yet appear what you shall be, when he shall appear, you shall be like him: for you shall see him as he is*, to your eternal safety and glory.

S E R M O N XVIII.

JOHN XVII. 24.

*Father, I will that they also whom thou
hast given me, be with me where I am;
that they may behold my glory.---*

THESE are the words of our dear and dying Redeemer, praying over his disciples when about to take his farewell of them, and go unto the Father. Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end ; and, from that love provided for them as to both worlds.

Being to leave them for a time on earth, that he might not leave them comfortless, he earnestly commended them to his Father's care : praying, though not that he should presently *take them out of the world*, yet that he *would keep them from the evil*.

But whatever privileges they enjoyed upon earth, earth was but earth still : A place of labour and suffering, trouble and temptation, and very unfit to be their rest : One far removed from their Father's house ; and whilst remaining thereupon, their state was to be but imperfect

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perfect comparatively, their communion with God little and unconstant, and their dearly Beloved was to be out of their sight : With whom they earnestly longed and desired to be, and whose pleasure and promise it was, that they should be so.

Wherefore, having requested their preservation whilst in the world, he further insists upon their happiness when taken out of it ; and this was the highest that could be enjoyed. Nothing less could satisfy his love for them, nor fully answer the dignity and privilege of the relation in which they stood to him.

While looking up to heaven, whither he was speedily to ascend, he, with the most affectionate vehemence, thus interceeds for them, *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory.*

The doctrinal proposition, I would briefly consider, is this.

Doct. *It is the will of Christ, which shall certainly be fulfilled as to all that the Father hath given him, that they may be perfectly and forever happy, in being with him where he is, beholding his glory.*

It is their future eternal blessedness he here desires, and that in a very peculiar and pressing manner, as what he most earnestly desired, and was not willing it should be denied him, *Father, I will, &c.*

Many requests he had put up for them, relating to their sanctification, safety and comfort in and throughout their state in this world :
but

but to these he adds one more, as the crown of all, concerning their happiness in another, *viz. That they might be with him, where he was going to be, in the same place and state, and to the most desirable end; that they might behold his glory, and share in it, to their full and everlasting satisfaction.*

His death was now at hand; and so, his entrance into heaven, as mediator: where, as to his divine nature, he now, and always was: and we find him speaking of himself in this respect, as already there, *John i. 18. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* Chapter iii. 13. *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.* But, as not being willing to know the sweetness of heaven alone, when now become mediator for his people, and to have them kept at a distance from partaking of this together with him, he says, *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am: i. e. I plead upon thy gift of them to me, that these which are so dear to me, may not continue to be so far from me, as earth is from heaven: I being now become so intimately one with them as I am, I would have them, in due time, in the same place with myself, and there, in order to their compleat felicity, to behold my glory.*

In speaking to this, I would do these two or three things.

I. Shew that Christ has a people in the world, in a peculiar manner given him of the Father.

II. That

II. That they shall be with him in heaven, and perfectly happy in being so, as *beholding his glory.*

III. That Christ's will concerning this shall certainly be fulfilled, as to all that are his. And *Lastly*, Apply these.

I. Christ has a people in the world, in a peculiar manner given him of the Father.

These he often mentions, and bears them upon his heart in his application to heaven; *ver. 6. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. So, ver. 9. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine.* He delights to speak of them under this notion, *as his*, as a powerful argument to back his request for them: *Holy Father, keep through thine own Name those whom thou hast given me, ver. 11.*

Here I might shew,

Who they are, that are given to Christ, When they were, or are so, and in what respects.

I. As to the persons given him, Christ plainly speaks, *ver. 10. All mine are thine, and thine are mine:* which, as opposed to the world, are to be understood of all God's chosen, those that already do, or hereafter shall believe in him: concerning whom it is said, *2 Tim. ii. 19. The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.* Tho' they lie for a time *undistinguished* among the children of wrath, and afterward may have many unsound professors mixed with them, yet the Lord knoweth

knoweth them that are his among them: his, as by his special purpose set apart for himself, to be effectually recovered out of their lost estate, and kept from falling, and given to Christ in order thereto: whose therefore they all are, so as no others are besides them; and in whom he has a peculiar interest, such as he has in none else.

He is head over all things to his church, which he loved, and gave himself for, *Eph. i. 22, and v. 25.* He calls them his sheep, for whom he laid down his life, *John x. 15.* For the sake of these he sanctified himself, and had power given him over all flesh, to give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him: which are all that the Father *bath from the beginning chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, 2 Thes. ii. 13.*

2. These persons spoken of, which are given to Christ, and given him from everlasting by firm purpose, and in time by effectual vocation: (*According as he bath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, Ephes. i. 4. God having from the beginning chosen them to salvation,*) He, with the same early love chose for them a Saviour too: and according to his purpose, in the appointed season *calls them into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. i. 9.* And he will not fail to go on doing so, till all his flock are gathered in, and as many as are ordained to eternal life, brought to believe, *Acts xiii. 48.* Of this Christ speaks with assurance, *John vi. 37. All that the Father giveth me, shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.*

3. The

3. The heirs of salvation are by the covenant of redemption given to Christ, as his charge and reward.

First, As his charge. They are committed to him as their all-sufficient Redeemer, to be ransomed by his blood; and afterwards recovered and healed by his grace, pardoned, sanctified and conducted to glory.

They are distinctly numbered out to him: *Isaiah* xlix. 12. *Behold, these shall come from far: and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Sinim.* And all are given into his hand, that he may look after them, give an account of them, and see that none of them be lost, or found imperfect, when they shall be called for. And to all this Christ readily agrees, *Isaiah* l. 5. *The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.* He with the greatest cheerfulness accepted the mighty trust, tho' he was by the bitterest sufferings to be made perfect for the bringing many sons unto glory, *Heb.* ii. 10. Their names are written down in his *book of life*, *Rev.* xxi. 27. And they are all of them known to him, from the first to the last of them, and shall always be remembered by him, now when he is gone into his kingdom, in order to their safe arrival there after him, in the appointed season.

Upon this account, the Father speaks of him with the highest satisfaction, *Isaiah* xliii. 1. *Behold my Servant whom I uphold, mine Elect in whom my soul delighteth:* he commissioned and sent him into the world, to accomplish his pleasure in the salvation of his people: in pursuit of which,

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which, Christ speaks of himself, *John vi. 38, 39. I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.*

Secondly, As they are given him as his charge; so they are given him as his reward too. They are given him as a people peculiar to himself, appointed to bear his image, and be the triumphs of his love. They are brought into a vital union with him, and thereupon to stand in the most endeared relations to him, those of his children and chosen, his spouse and members, in whom he shall be glorified, and for ever rejoice. As the fruit of his great undertaking and faithfulness in it, he is promised to *see his seed*, and have a numerous off-spring out of all nations: the Father thus speaking to him, *Isaiah xlix. 6. It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my Servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth. Ch. liii. 8. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? &c. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied, ver. 11.*

In consideration of which words of promise, with what cheerfulness does he proclaim, *Psalms xl. 7, 8. Lo, I come, &c. I delight to do thy will, O my God?* That will which he delighted to do, was that by which he was to lay down his life, and take it up again, that he might receive and enjoy the purchased and promised reward of it.
And

And he will at last appear in triumph before the Father, saying, *Behold, I and the children which God hath given me*, Heb. ii. 13.

This was part of the joy which was set before him, for which he so patiently endured the cross, despised the shame, and is now set down at the right-hand of God. And when the whole church shall be perfected in one body, and presented before him, and all the children of the kingdom gathered into it, and brought where he is, making up *a multitude which no man can number*, (Rev. vii. 9.) they will appear to be a glorious prize, in running for which, the great Redeemer will not repent his labour, but rest in his love, and crown them with everlasting joy in his presence.

And so I come to the second thing,

II. That they that are thus given to Christ shall be with him in heaven, and perfectly happy in being so, as *beholding his glory*.

They shall be with him in heaven. Thither their risen Redeemer is gone before them. He ascended in the presence and view of his disciples, whose faith in his second coming in glory, was confirmed by the testimony of angels, *Acts* i. 11. In heaven *Stephen* saw him at the right-hand of God: and, from thence all the faithful wait for him, as their complete Redeemer at the last day, 1 *Thes.* i. 10. In the mean while the heavens must receive him, till the time of the restitution of all things: and thither his people, tho' they do not follow him now, shall follow him afterwards, *John* xiii. 36.

They shall do it,

1. At death. The soul shall not drop with
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the body into the silent grave ; nor fall into a senseless sleep ; but those of all that are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, shall immediately be received into eternal glory. Christ tells the penitent thief when hanging upon the cross, *To day shalt thou be with me in paradise*, Luke xxiii. 43. And the martyr *Stephen*, when ready to breathe his last, prays him to receive his departing spirit, committing it with firm trust into his hands, as it is the privilege of every dying believer to do. Whenever their earthly tabernacle is dissolved, they have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ; brighter abodes into which they shall joyfully enter, as soon as they are removed from their burthenfom habitations below.

The spirits of just men are made perfect above, tho' their flesh see corruption, and remain for a time under ground. Upon their being absent from the body, they shall be present with the Lord : to which, as knowing it to be far better, they can calmly submit, and some of them earnestly desire to be dissolved in order thereto, *Phil. i. 23*. Their present life is to them matter of patience, and their removal from it to the heavenly glory, their ardent wish ; and nothing but the love of Jesus could make them willing to bear the burden of life, who hope for so blessed a change by dying. As to them to live is Christ, so to die will be gain : and they labour, whether present or absent, to be accepted of him, *Phil. i. 21. 2 Cor. v. 9*.

2. At the last day. The bodies of saints shall not be left under an everlasting cover of earth, nor their souls be happy alone ; but as they have served their Redeemer together, and, it may be, suffered for him, they shall also be glorified together at last, and both reign with him. Their flesh rests in hope of this, and shall not be forgotten, but again reunited to their blessed spirits, that they may enter whole and intire men into the joy of their Lord. Having waited all the days of their appointed time, till their change comes, and afterwards rested a while in their graves, God will have a desire to the work of his hands, and call so powerfully as that they shall answer, and awake and sing that dwell in the dust, *Job xiv. 14, 15. Isaiah xxvi. 19.* Christ being risen from the dead, is become *the first fruits of them that slept,* 1 Cor. xv. 20. *For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him,* when he comes to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then they which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord,* 1 Thes. iv. 14, 15, &c. *With the Lord, and for ever with him,* noting the perfection and perpetuity of their blessedness ; with the believing thoughts of which, well may the heirs of salvation be bid to *comfort one another,* ver. 18, considering what is implied and carried in them.

(1.) To

(1.) To be with the Lord *where he is*, as the text speaks, is to be in the most *bright* and *glorious place*, the *mount Sion*, the *city of the living God*, the *everlasting kingdom*, the *celestial paradise*, the *third heaven*, framed by the Most High for the *residence of his throne*, and the *temple of his presence*: one filled with the glory of God and the Lamb, which supply the place of the sun, and make an eternal day, in which the blessed inhabitants shall always live, and always rejoice, *Rev. xxi. 23, 24.* *And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it.*

(2.) To be with him *where he is*, is to be perfectly freed from all evil, which can have no place in the presence of the glorified Redeemer, where salvation is compleat, and shall be evidenced to be so. From thence therefore, *sin* and *sorrow*, *pain*, *persecution*, *affliction*, *temptation*, and *all other evils and imperfections* shall be for ever excluded. In this tabernacle of the present body they groaned, being burdened; but shall no more do so, when once they have laid it down, but *mortality* is swallowed up of *life*.

Their manifold infirmities and heavy burdens, their weakness and wants, doubts and fears, sickness, diseases, and numberless calamities, that are their dolorous companions in the way to the grave, shall there be buried, and never rise more. Being called up thither where their Redeemer is, God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor

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crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away, Rev. xxi. 4. Though here they may go forth mourning, the ransomed of the Lord shall arrive at the heavenly *Sion* with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away, *Isaiab xxxv. 10.*

(3.) To be with him *where he is*, is to be raised to the highest perfection their natures are capable of, that they may be meet to dwell with him, and suited to the employments and enjoyments of the heavenly state. It is to have their minds filled with the clearest light, and their hearts enlarged. and enflamed with the most ardent love; to be universally holy, and without all spot, to join with the glorious assembly of the first-born in contemplating, admiring, praising and adoring the fountain of their being and blessedness for ever.

(4.) To be with him, *where he is*, is to live under the brightest displays of the divine perfections, and the freest communications of his love and goodness never to be intercepted, nor abated, nor end. They shall be with Christ where he is, *viz.* in the most honourable and holy place of God's presence, where there is *fulness of joy* for them and him, and *pleasures for evermore*; where eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the heart conceive what good and great things God hath prepared for them that love him; where they that are admitted to enter and dwell, live under the light of his countenance never more to be eclipsed or withdrawn. They shall never sin: God will never frown or look on them with a
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displeased

displeased eye more : they shall know him better than they can here conceive, and love him more than they can now think ; and by knowledge and love have immediate uninterrupted communion with him, to their unspeakable delight, satisfaction and joy for ever.

(5.) They shall be with him *where he is*, and so must be for ever safe under his and his Father's hand. By his everlasting merit, unchangeable promise, and faithfulness and love, secured to enjoy the blessedness he hath raised them to, throughout all eternity. Their God lives for ever : their Saviour will never die ; and because he lives, they shall live also.

Lastly, They shall be with him *where he is*, to behold his glory.

(1.) *His glory*, as the *Emanuel*, God and man in one person : a short glimpse of which at his transfiguration, made *Peter* cry out, as if in heaven, *Lord, it is good for us to be here*, Matth. xvii. 4.

(2.) *His glory*, as that of the only begotten Son of the Father, infinitely dear to him, and beloved by him : *The glory which he had with him before the foundation of the world was*, and this shining forth in its fullest lustre.

(3.) *His glory*, that which he so freely lost or suffered to be clouded when he came down to take their nature upon him, and in it to die upon a cross of infamy and pain : for *though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich*. And under the sense of this, believers love him now when they see him not : but when they shall see

what he voluntarily denied himself the glory of, and for their sakes, when he descended to this earth, and view what he evidently appears to be possessed of, when they get to heaven to see him there, as the most high God, as well as man; how ravishing will be the sight!

(4.) *His glory* for whose dishonour they have often mourned; and therefore now seeing him so highly exalted, they must *rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.*

(5.) *His glory*, which they shall be always privileged to behold, and by the sight, be transformed into his likeness, and shine in his beams, and in his light and love be happy for ever.

How low soever our state may be at present, this is what the meanest given Christ of the Father, shall be raised unto. His resemblance begun here, shall be perfected above. *Here we beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Cor. iii. 18.* And though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, *We know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is, 1 John iii. 2.*

And so we are brought to the last thing, *viz.*

III. That the will of Christ concerning this shall certainly be fulfilled, as to all that are given him.

Many considerations might strengthen our faith herein. As,

1. Who it is that here signifies his desire, The eternal Son of God and Saviour of men, in whom the Father is well pleased, and whom he always hears.

2. To

2. To whom he makes known his request, *viz.* to his Father, in whose love his interest can never fail.

3. What he desires, *viz.* heavenly glory : which, how great soever, is no more than infinite mercy designed, and resolved to give from everlasting ; and which was promised him before the world began, and which having laid down his life to obtain, he now sues for in right of his purchase.

4. The persons for whom he here intercedes, *those whom thou hast given me* : those which by an early love thou hast had in thine eye and heart for their good, having from the beginning chosen them to salvation, and committed them into my hands to bring them thereto. O deny them not those provisions thou hast declared thyself so willing to bestow.

5. The time when he puts up this desire, when he was about to leave the world, and that by the most painful death, in obedience to his Father's will, and for the advancing of his glory. O let not my request be denied, which I now lay down my life to obtain, *that whom thou hast given me, be with me.*

6. The manner in which he puts it up, with the greatest earnestness of heart, with a temper very different from what he shews in his own case. When in view of his own sufferings, he prayed, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt, *Mat. xxvi. 39.* In his own case, we see, he prayed conditionally for a favour from his Father : but here, in his peoples, he

seems to pray absolutely, as knowing he asked for what his Father had promised, and would grant. O thou that hearest me always, as thou hast regard to these that lie next my very heart, and whom thou hast given me by covenant, *I will that they may be with me.*

Lastly, The end for which he put it up, *that they may behold my glory.* O let me not want their company above, nor they the felicity of being where I am. The glory thou wilt give me is truly worthy thy love to me : O let it be seen by these my friends ; that they may rejoice with me, and be happy in that love of thine. I have told them, *in my Father's house are many mansions,* and that *I go to prepare a place for them* therein ; and have promised, *that where I am, there shall also my servant be :* O let not my word, and their expectations fall to the ground. If in this life only they had hope in me, they were of all men most miserable ; seeing they meet with the hardest treatment in it, and have nothing to see or enjoy that can satisfy their souls. Wherefore, O Father, as I am coming to thee myself, *I will that they also that thou hast given me, be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory. Amen and Amen.*

APPLICATION.

1. How constant and comprehensive is the love of Christ to his people, and how earnest is his desire of their compleat salvation !

He was pleased with the forethoughts of being with them, before he appeared on earth among them. Being *set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was,* He was rejoicing
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in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men, Prov. viii. 23, 31.

And he came down in time, from his throne to a cross, with the greatest willingness *to save that which was lost*. And he would not only save the lost from sin and hell; but as about to ascend to heaven, he prayed, *Father, I will that they also be with me where I am*; that so they might obtain salvation with eternal glory.

2. With what seriousness should we enquire, whether we belong to him, yea or no.

And for this you need not ascend to heaven, to turn over the book of the divine decrees: it is to be determined by what hath passed between Christ and your souls, in conformity to the calls and directions of the gospel. Have you received him, as offered, and committed yourselves with firm trust into his hand, as your only all-sufficient Saviour, to be to you, and do for you all that he is appointed to be and do for lost sinners in order for their recovery? Do you own his authority, and bow to the sceptre of his grace; casting yourselves intirely on his meritorious sacrifice and prevalent intercession, for pardon, acceptance and eternal glory? All that the Father giveth him, thus come unto him; and him that cometh, he will in no wise cast out.

Pray for the divine Spirit to persuade and enable you to do this, and do not put a bar in his way, by sloth, opposition, or delay. How sad is it to live upon the brink of eternity, and to have no hope when taken hence, of being with Christ, and beholding his glory?

3. Having done this, let the consideration of
Christ's

Christ's prayer and promise, his faithfulness and love, confirm your trust in him under all the burdens of the present state. What a powerful cordial have they to keep them from fainting, who can say, I know whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day?

4. Be not careless of your walk: do not neglect your duty, or let down your watch. Tho' Christ hath prayed that all his may be with him where he is, whatever he asks is agreeable to the will of God. Now, this is the will of God, even your sanctification, as, without holiness none can see his face. Thus runs the command and promise together, *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be,* John xii. 26.

5. Greatly delight in Christ's spiritual presence, till you are called up to be with him, to behold his glory. Where two or three are gathered together in his name, they have his promise, that there he will be in the midst of them; and, to such assemblies the believer goes, in hopes of sitting down under his shadow with great delight, and finding his fruit sweet to his taste.

6. Earnestly long, and yet patiently wait for your remove, that you may be with Christ. Earnestly long for it: for what is there on earth in comparison of the glory to be revealed? Patiently wait for it: remembering that he that has expressed his desire that you may be with him in glory, knows the fittest season wherein to send for you, and will assuredly remember you when that season comes.

S E R M O N XIX.

I THES. II. 19.

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

THESE words are expressive of the Apostle *Paul's* high value and esteem for these believing *Thessalonians*; and are a pattern of that which every minister of Christ, who breathes after the salvation of souls, should have for all those among whom his labours have been blessed with success.

It has been observed, that where the gospel hath come, it hath usually been attended with the greatest success at first. The sun of righteousness, at its first rising over such as have long sat in great darkness, hath often been more gladly welcomed, and so hath brought healing in his wings; and great hath been the change that hath followed upon it.

This the Apostle recounts with thankfulness as the fruit of his preaching among the *Thessalonians*

lonians in the foregoing chapter, Ch. i. 5. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. It eminently prevailed upon them, so as that they turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and brought them to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus which delivered them from the wrath to come.

He appeals to their knowledge in the beginning of this chapter, as to the successful manner of his and his brethren ministers entrance in unto them, *that it was not in vain.* And he declares, *ver. 13. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.* This was the encouraging fruit of his ministry here, and you may be sure, his strongest inducement to stay, and spend and be spent among them. And though he was removed from them suddenly, this was not from his choice, but from his enemies violence. And when he was parted from them, it was as to place and presence only: As to affection, he left his heart with them still, and was desirous of nothing more, than that a way might be opened for his coming back to them again.

The words, as connected with the foregoing, have the nature of an apology, made by the Apostle to the Christians at *Thessalonica* in excuse of his absence. *But we, brethren, being taken from you for a skort time, in presence, not in heart,*
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endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire, &c. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoycing? are not ye in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

In these words, as taken in conjunction, we may take notice,

1. Of the endearing title he gives them, *Brethren*. Though in some sense a Father to them, having begotten them through the gospel; yet as ministers and people are to be saved the same way, *viz.* by their union to Christ, and dependence upon him, he speaks to his fellow-christians, as *brethren*.

All that hold the head are mutually related to each other, as members in the same body, branches in the same vine, and children in the same family, the *household of faith*. And the youngest child there, is a child still; every of which, the eldest and strongest will gladly own their relation to. The apostle, though a special favourite of heaven, and one that had been there, and now stood so near it as to have the brightest prospect of it, kindly calls those *brethren*, who were travelling the same way with himself, how much soever below him in strength and stature. Such as have best learned Christ, are most like him in humility, and meekness, and tender love to all his members; especially towards such as they have helped to bring into so blessed a state.

2. Of the nature of his separation, and his temper and carriage under it. *Being [taken] from you*: It is as if he had said, my departure was not of choice, but necessity, from labouring

bouring among you. The cause of it we have, *Acts xvii. 5, 6, &c.*

We, i. e. I and my fellow labourers were not ashamed of the gospel among you, nor weary of our work with you: We would gladly have pursued what was so well begun; but in a most malignant way were driven from among you. And, as our departure was not free, we hope the separation shall not be long. This we can say, that it is not **TOTAL**: We were taken away, but not the *all* of us; we were taken away in presence, not in heart; and could not but carry with us the strongest inclination (if it were the will of God) to return to our delightful work among those we loved.

Christ, the great shepherd and bishop of souls, upon his ascending up on high, carried the names of his people, like as the high priest of old, the type of him did, upon his breast and next his heart; in token he would be always mindful of them, and always appear for them, before *his* Father and *theirs*. And though he is in a sense gone, he is in a sense present too, with them; and would have them believe it, as he hath said for their support. *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen, Matth xxviii. 20.* In like manner, such as he has counted faithful, putting them into the ministry, will in this imitate their Lord, *watching for souls, as those that must give an account.* And whatever may occasion their absence for a time, from such as they stand in a special relation to, they will, as far as able, keep up their care for them, and affection to them, and desire to see them;

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to be helpers of their faith and joy, and bring them on in their way to heaven : where they may dwell together with their Lord and one another for ever.

This was the Apostle's temper, evidenced in his abundant endeavours to have his great desire satisfied, of returning to those in his bodily presence, with whom he had left his heart.

3. Of the reason and end for which his affections were so strongly carried towards them, viz. not any low or secular advantage of his own, but the good of their souls, and their eternal salvation.

He sought not theirs, for himself ; but them, for Christ. To bring them to him, to build them up in him, to prepare them to meet and stand before him, was the great design he was intent upon ; and accordingly he expresses it in a remarkable gradation, *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing ? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ ?*

4. Of the season in which he eminently expected to reap the fruit of his ministerial labours, namely, *at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ ?*

He adds in the following verse, *For ye are our glory and joy.* i. e. Ye are so now, as recovered and brought home to Christ : but what a blissful and joyful day will that be, when we shall meet together in the presence of the Lord at his coming ? Being then to *see him as he is*, and so *to appear with him in glory.*

Having thus laid open the words several things may be collected from them, fit to be considered :
As,

First, *Whatever difference there may be, and is among the disciples of Christ, as to office, and age, and growth, they are mutually related to each other as brethren.*

This the Apostle most affectionately owns to these believing *Thessalonians*, calling them, *Brethren*, how far soever below him: And well he might, when our blessed Lord speaks of his disciples as under the same relation to himself. He points to those who do the will of his Father, saying, *Behold, my mother and my brethren*, Mark iii. 34. He sends to them under that character, immediately after his resurrection, *Mat. xxviii. 10.* and *John xx. 17.* *Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God and your God.*

Saints are all of them the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ; begotten of the same incorruptible seed, the word of truth; adopted into his family, and entitled to the same inheritance; quickened and renewed by the same Spirit; united to the same Lord and Head: And they being made partakers of a divine nature, life and likeness from God, in and by Christ, both he that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified, are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, *Heb. ii. 11.* And, if our Master is not ashamed to call us brethren, we must not be ashamed to call one another so; and this not in formality, but in truth, and with an answerable love. The church is God's family, made up of all that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints throughout the world: nay, it is not confined to earth, but takes in the
glorious

glorious assembly of the first-born, whose names are written, and whose spirits are perfected in heaven.

They that are in their natural state are said to be *far off, strangers and foreigners*: But upon their embracing the offer of the gospel, they become *fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God*. This is the privilege, not of christians only of the tallest stature, but of all to whom the title in truth agrees: as the weakest child is as truly related to the Father, as the eldest and most grown. There is one mystical body of which they are members, and one Spirit by which they are animated and acted, even as they are called in one hope of their calling; and have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all for theirs, who is above all, and through all, and in them all. *Eph. iv. 4, 5, 6.* What unity and peace, what affection and love then, should reign among all true christians? *Behold, how good and how pleasant is it for brethren to dwell together in unity, Psal. cxxxiii. 1.* As they are born from heaven, and tending to it, how readily should they assist, encourage and help on the salvation of their fellow-christians, and endeavour to promote it? They should comfort themselves and one another, with the promise and prospect of being at last brought to their Father's house, to be for ever with their Lord, and all the children of the kingdom; and so, should in the sweetest unity, affection and peace, walk together by the way. O what blessed societies should we have, were things brought into such an order as this!

Secondly, Considering the Apostle's stay at *Thessalonica*, as short, and that he and *Silas* were by persecution driven from thence, the very mention of *brethren* here, may lead us to observe,

That where God sends the gospel, as it is a token that he has a people there to be gathered in ; so he will accompany it with a power whereby it shall not fail to reach the end for which it is sent.

Though the prophets do not live for ever, and it may be, but a very little while in one place ; yet God's word shall take hold of, and prove the favour of life to some ; though to others it may prove the favour of death unto death. When God will work, a great deal shall be done in a little time, and nothing shall hinder the opening of the hearts of some, to entertain the message and messengers of peace ; though others are hardened, and judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. Christ's people shall be willing in the day of his power : And though his servants have complained of disappointment, as to some ; yet, at the same time they have gained on others, and left them as the visible triumphs of victorious grace ; with more seeds under the clods, which have afterwards sprung up, and by the divine blessing and the influences of the Spirit, been improved to a plentiful harvest. The gospel came not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost to these *Thessalonians* ; and their ministers entrance was not in vain, though their abode was not so long as they could have wished.

Thirdly, It is not without difficulty, that ministers are taken, though but for a time, from those

those to whom they have preached the gospel with success : And as they leave their hearts behind at parting, so they are strongly inclined, with submission to the will of God, to return ; and nothing in all the world can be so welcome to them, as an opportunity to do so. They that preach not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, esteem and own it the greatest kindness you can possibly do them, to entertain the Offer they are sent to make, and to close with him in whole name they come ; and cannot but think and speak of such as they have been instrumental in winning to him, with peculiar affection. We were willing, says the Apostle to the believers here, ver. 8. to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. They pity those to whom the gospel is hid, and so are like to be for ever lost, and often pour out their tears over them : They rejoice at the news that any souls are recovered, and such great good done : They bear a tender love to the whole household of faith ; but such as through grace, have by their ministry been brought over to Christ, are dear to them above others. Spiritual fathers naturally care for the state of their children, whom they have begotten through the gospel, 1 Cor. iv. 15. And remembering Christ's charge, as they love him, to feed his sheep, and his lambs, it is their delight to stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, and help on their faith, holiness and joy. They are set to watch for souls, as those that must give an account : And, as the roaring lion continually goes about seeking whom he may devour, they cannot but have

a deep concern when absent, lest any belonging to their charge should miscarry ; and the great shepherd should meet them, and ask, *With whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness ?* And they should have nothing to answer.

Where the Spirit of God has owned and succeeded their labours, they can sit down and abide with the greater satisfaction, in hope of further help. And, if their Lord should demand, as he did of *Elijah ? What dost thou here, Elijah ?* Can answer with comfort, “ Here I am, in the post
“ thou hast set me, and about thy work, warn-
“ ing sinners, and endeavouring to train up those
“ souls for heaven, which by grace thou hast
“ made me instrumental of bringing into the
“ way leading to it.”

To be imployed in such work as this, holy *Paul* was content to have his reception to heaven for a time deferred, *Phil. i. 24, 25.* And, when such as share in his Spirit, are by persecutions, or other providences parted from their flocks that are dear to them as their own souls, they cannot, any of them, but look wishfully back, and take leave in *David's* language, *2 Sam. xv. 25. If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, i. e. the ark, and his habitation. But if he thus says, I have no delight in thee, if he will use me no longer : Behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.*

This is the temper with which they live : and when at death they are called away, (as ministers must die as well as others) it has been observed, as to several of those whom God has
made

made eminently successful in winning souls, that he has prepared the way for their leaving the world with less reluctance, by removing many of those they have forgotten in the gospel, before them: that so, when knowing that the most and best of their friends are already with their Lord above, they may be the more willing to be there also.

But when the shepherd must remove, and leave his beloved flock behind, he cannot but express his affection in making Christ's dying prayer his own for them, *John xvii. 11. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world: Holy Father, keep through thine own Name those whom thou hast given thy Son, and made me instrumental in bringing to him.* The believing consideration that the great and good Shepherd lives, is as to this, their great support when they come to die. They know, he took care of his church before they were born, and can, and will when they are dead and gone: And, on this bottom they are kept from fainting, as to themselves and others: knowing whom they have believed, and that he is able to keep what they have committed to him against that day.

4. *Whatever sets others upon preaching, faithful ministers make the saving of souls their great concern, the matter of their hope and serious desire now; and reckon upon those they have been instrumental to bring into the way of salvation, as their joy, and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.*

Here I shall briefly consider,

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I. The

- I. The reasons upon which Christ's faithful ministers are so seriously engaged in saving souls.
- II. The joy they shall have in the souls they shall win, *in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.*

I. Whence it is Christ's faithful ministers are so serious and intent upon saving souls, making this the great object of their desire and hope, the scope of their prayers, and the business of their lives.

The springs and motives to this, are :

1. The divine command and charge laid upon them, *Acts xx. 28. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, &c. And Col. iv. 17. And say to Archippus, (and in him to every one that stands in the same office under Christ, and relation to him,) Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.* And with what solemnity is it repeated to Timothy, *2 Tim. iv. 1, 2. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom: Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, &c.* And the end of this is, that they may save themselves, and them that hear them, that their common eternal salvation may eternally redound to the praise of the glory of God's grace. And having a command and order from heaven, *Necessity*, says the Apostle, *is laid upon me: yea, Wo is me, if I preach not the gospel,* *1 Cor. ix. 16.*

2. The Spirit and grace of Christ in faithful ministers excite their desires after the salvation of souls, and their endeavours to promote it. When they preach not an unknown Saviour, but have a special

special interest in him, the heavenly life and love wherewith they are inspired themselves, will engage them heartily to long and labour for the good of others. How visibly did this work in holy *Paul*, when professing it was his *heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel, that they might be saved*, Rom. x. 1. He travailed in birth as to the *Galatians*, as it were with labouring pangs to see Christ formed in them, *Gal. iv. 19*. He ceased not to warn the *Ephesians*, every one of them night and day with tears, *Acts xx. 31*. He was willing to spend and be spent for the *Corinthians*, (2 Cor. xii. 15.) for their spiritual advantage, that they may be saved. This was his aim: and a heart principled with the same grace in such as come after him, will proportionably be carried the same way.

3. The example of Christ calls all that are employed by him in the work of the Gospel, to the greatest faithfulness and diligence for the good of souls. As he came to seek and to save that which is lost, with what earnestness, diligence and delight did he endeavour it? He continually went about doing good, esteemed it his meat and drink to do the will of his Father, and finish his work. He declared, I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh wherein no man can work. The zeal of God's house eat him up. He spared no pains, lost no time, but improved all opportunities to pursue his saving design, till his work was finished. And, herein his servants are to imitate him, not counting their lives dear to themselves, so that they may finish their course with joy, and the mi-

nistry which they have received of the Lord Jesus, *Acts* xx. 24.

4. The worth of souls in themselves, and in the esteem of him that made them, for one of which the whole world can be no valuable ransom, will, and ought to quicken ministers to earnestness and diligence in promoting their salvation. Considering moreover,

5. The danger they are in from the world *without*, and corruption within, and from the malice of satan the grand enemy of souls, that continually goes about, like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Numberless snares he sets, and when any are caught and miscarry under the gospel, how dreadful is the misery into which they sink! *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*, i. e. we set ourselves with the greatest seriousness to do so.

6. Seeing Christ laid down his life as the price of our people's redemption, what a powerful argument have we to be seriously bent upon promoting their salvation? *Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*, *Acts* xx. 28. How worthy are they of our chiefest care, who are thus redeemed at the dearest rate, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot? *1 Pet.* i. 18, 19. Did Christ die for souls, and shall not I look after them? Did he account them worth his blood, and is not promoting their salvation worth my labour? Has he done and suffered so much for their salvation, and made me a co-worker with him, and shall I not gladly spend and be spent
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in order thereto? Who can look upon such a congregation as he is set over in the Lord, and consider them as the purchase of his blood, and not long after them all in the bowels of Christ, and earnestly labour that none of them be lost?

7. The strict account ministers are to give of the souls of those committed to their charge, may well be another motive to them to use the utmost diligence in their important work. Who can read those awful words with application to himself, without the deepest concern, *Ezek. iii. 17, 18. Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die: and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, &c. he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul?* What affectionate desires and endeavours should be awakened by such a charge as this, that we may be clear from the blood of all men? What concern not only for saving our own souls, by delivering our message, but that our people's also may be saved, by entertaining it?

Lastly, The glory is so great that is before us, that it well deserves all the pains we could take, were we able to take ten thousand times more, to save ourselves, and them that hear us.

Having thus considered the springs or motives that set ministers on work,

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II. I might come to mention the joy Christ's faithful servants shall have in the souls they win, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

Every recovered soul will be a jewel added to their crown. And, O the honour to have a long train at that day, when Christ shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Here they labour for Christ in bringing souls to him; there they shall rejoice with him. *He that bath the bride is the bridegroom: But the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and beareth him, i. e. expressing his affection to such are his spouse and church made perfect, rejoiceth greatly.* What a joy will it be, that they that were once this and that minister's charge in a world of snares and dangers, are arrived safe at the promised everlasting rest! That when all the members of Christ's mystical body shall be presented spotless before him, they shall see any among the shining train, of whom they may say, "These are they whose
"salvation we earnestly desired, and as faithfully
"sought, as our own! These are they whom we
"were set to watch over, and pray for; whom
"we imparted the gospel to, and were ready to-
"gether with it to have imparted our own
"souls." O blessed be God, will they say every one of them, for employing me in his service, and owning me in it, and casting my lot among any whom he purposed to bless, and train up for glory. Blessed be God, that I see so many among whom he would not suffer me to labour in vain: Whose hearts he opened, whose wills he bowed,
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and brought to receive his word from me, as his, though delivered by so weak an hand. Blessed be God for the comfortable society we had together in yonder world, where grace was preparing us for a higher state; and that now our glorified Lord is come to take us to himself, that in his presence and love we may be happy for ever.

APPLICATION.

1. How weighty a matter is it to have the charge of souls, in order to appear with them in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming, and there have them our joy and crown, or our grief and dejection at that day! How important the work, to watch for souls, as those that must give an account! for souls immortal, and never to die! for souls redeemed by the precious blood of Christ! for souls in danger of perishing for ever, but which may yet be saved; and if they are so, will not only be delivered from the wrath to come, but obtain salvation with eternal glory! Should we not watch and warn, call and cry, be instant in season, and out of season, when we are all near the everlasting world; and we that speak, and you that hear, are both a dying into it, and at length to appear before our judge? Where faithful ministers, and obedient people shall meet one another with a joy that no words can express, and is the beginning of that which shall never end. Brethren pray for us, and therein for yourselves, that the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in our hands.

2. When ministers are apt to grow faint or flat in gospel ministrations, or people to grow so,
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in attending upon them : let both endeavour to quicken themselves with the thought, that their Lord is coming. And, should we not speak and hear at another rate, were we under more lively impressions that we are certainly to appear before him ?

3. Of what moment is it, That ministers have their hearts engaged in their work, as they would expect the divine blessing in it, and a comfortable end of it. They who make the conversion and saving of souls their desire and hope now, are like to find it matter of joy at last : but it will be no wonder, if heartless sermons prove fruitless ones too.

4. How heavy will be the doom under which those will fall at last, who perish under a gospel faithfully dispensed ; as being chargeable not only with wronging and destroying their own souls, but thereby doing what in them lies, to rob their ministers of what they most earnestly desire, *viz.* the having them *their joy, and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.*

Sinners may now make light of this ; but will not do so before the Judge, when they who now watch over, and speak to them in the name of the Lord, shall appear against them. Faithful ministers desire not the evil day, and unpleasing pleasing task, O Lord, thou knowest ; but they that rob them of the satisfaction of giving up their accounts with joy, do provide for their own greater torment, *Heb. xiii. 17. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give*
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an account : that they may do it with joy, and not with grief : for that is unprofitable for you.

5. Seeing this is not the world in which we are always to live together, let us labour to improve our present day, that we may have a happy meeting in that day we are looking for. Whenever I speak in the name of Christ, O that I may do it in the view and expectation of his appearing again, travelling in birth till Christ be formed in you : and may you, under the same apprehension, hear as for your lives and eternity : and as you are *our hope* now, may you be *our joy in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.*

S E R M O N XX.

PHILIP. II. 12, 13.

—Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

THESE words are an exhortation to that which is our main business in this present world ; *The working out of our salvation* ; and to this as attended with a direction as to the manner of doing it, *viz. with fear and trembling* : both the one and the other is pressed with the most encouraging motive, *For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

There is no ground for despondency on one hand, nor for presumption on the other. The work is great and difficult ; yet to carry you on in it, you may expect a power above your own : *God worketh in you to will and to do.* But herein he is a free Agent, and may cease when he pleaseth : wherefore work with fear and trembling ; for he worketh of, or according to his good pleasure.

Doct.

Doct. *The working out of our salvation is the main business we have to do in this world: in which the consideration of God's free concurrence, should engage us to labour with the most serious diligence.*

In speaking to this, I shall endeavour to shew,

- I. What is supposed in the command *to work out our salvation?*
- II. What is included in *the salvation* we are to *work out.*
- III. What is implied in our *working out this*, and doing it *with fear and trembling.*
- IV. That *it is God that worketh* in all that are saved, *both to will and to do*, and this of *his good pleasure.*
- V. The force of the reason from such a representation of the divine influence to quicken and engage us to set about our part with the utmost diligence.

Lastly, The application.

I. What is supposed in the command *to work out our salvation?* And here three things are obvious, *viz.*

1. That we, while in our natural state, are lost creatures, liable to perish for ever.

Our being enjoined to work out our salvation, speaks us antecedently to this, in a lapsed miserable state; at present so, and in danger of one inconceivably worse, and that it is not with us now, as it was when men came first out of the hand of God. Man was then adorned with his Maker's image, happy in his love; and had he preserved himself innocent, he had remained always

ways so. But Man being in Honour did not long abide so: he soon sinned and forfeited his hopes of heaven, lost the happiness he enjoyed upon earth, and laid himself open to an everlasting hell: intailing the same on all his offspring, who, as born in sin, are by nature children of wrath, doomed to it, and prepared for it.

Salvation, as now become needful, speaks the primitive law broken, grace and heaven lost, the soul and body defiled, and both under the sentence of death, the wages of sin. Our being bid *to work out our salvation*, supposes this to be our antecedent condition, which may well keep us humble as long as we live. It is supposed,

2. That there is a way open, by which we may be delivered from all that evil present and future, which sin deserves, and may be made partakers of the glory and blessedness revealed in the gospel, as purchased by the death of Christ, and promised for his sake to all that believe: for we had never been enjoined *to work out our salvation*, had we been left under an inevitable necessity of perishing.

This command of working out our salvation is given us after we have had an account of the Redeemer's sufferings, by which our salvation is obtained, and after his exaltation to the right-hand of God, in order to its being applied. This was the end of his being sent, *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life*, John iii. 16.

Apostate angels are utterly lost. No Saviour is provided for them, no salvation is obtainable

by them: they have no ground to expect it, or encouragement to labour after it. It would be all in vain for them to seek it: but the Son of man is come into our world, to seek and to save that which was lost, *Luke xix. 10.* He was wounded for our transgressions: he was bruised for our iniquities, had the chastisement of our peace upon him, and therein laid the ground of our eternal redemption. By his sufferings and death, justice is satisfied, reconciliation made, death abolished, and so a way is opened to escape the wrath threatened; and life and immortality is brought to light through the gospel, which we are not only to view, but to lay hold on. It is *our Jesus*, who has delivered us from the wrath to come, by procuring the pardon of sin that exposed us to it, through his dying on the cross a sacrifice that we might never fall under it; and who now ever lives to make intercession at God's right-hand, that he may save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

3. This farther is supposed, that God is very desirous of their salvation, to whom this command is sent, and that nothing pleaseth him more than our compliance with it, and setting about it. And in proof of what is here supposed, it is elsewhere pathetically expressed, as *2 Pet. iii. 9.* *Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,* *Ezek. xxxiii. 11.* *As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he may turn from his way, and live. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?* i. e. Do not destroy your souls, after I have done so much for

your recovery. Such language as this from the great God, plainly intimates his compassion for lost sinners, and that though they have been self-destroyers, he is very desirous they should be saved.

These are the things supposed.

II. Let us see what is included in *the salvation* which it is our great business to *work out*.

And here, as considering ourselves in several respects and cases, what we are concerned to do in each of them, is plain. Considering ourselves ;

I. As fallen creatures, under the guilt and power of sin, our first work is to get our state changed, and not to rest satisfied till we are restored to the favour and image of God, and so brought into a state of reconciliation with him through Jesus Christ. Here our salvation in the application of it begins. And with what earnestness should it be laboured after by every one that loves his safety, and would not perish for ever? By nature, we are all over polluted and defiled, as well as guilty and condemned ; and the foundation of our recovery is laid in our being washed, and justified, and sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. When the kindness of God effectually appears for his peoples recovery, according to his mercy, he saveth them, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he sheds upon them abundantly through our Lord Jesus Christ, *Titus* iii. 5.

All

All the heirs of heaven are born from thence, and have all old things done away, and all things made new. The spirit of life from Christ Jesus takes hold of their souls, makes them sensible of their need of a Saviour, and brings them into a special union to him: upon which, his grace is communicated for their sanctification, and they are interested in his righteousness for pardon. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; and there is no condemnation to those that are in him, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The change is both real and relative: they are inwardly purified, and made partakers of a divine nature; and they are pardoned and justified too, and so, are of children of wrath, restored to the favour of God, accepted in the Beloved, and intitled to the privileges of his kingdom.

This is *the salvation*, which, if hitherto we are in a natural unregenerate state, we are *to work out*, or endeavour to be interested in, *i. e.* To get our eyes opened, our corruption subdued, our guilt removed; to seek to be delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and thereafter to follow him, as the captain of our salvation, under the conduct of his Spirit in the way of holiness, till we get to heaven.

How sad is the state of the sinner that is a stranger to salvation in this part of it! He is in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, under the guilt of all the sin that ever he committed, and in him it dwells in its power, and unsubdued. That which such an one has

to do, is to labour to be sensible of the sadness of his case, and get out of it; to cry earnestly to God for his quickening Spirit and pardoning grace, and never to rest satisfied, till he is heard and relieved.

Open thine eyes, O soul, take a view of thy misery, and say no more, *Peace, Peace*, till a change is made. A power greater than thine own, is necessary to do it: and in working out thy salvation, thy business is to call it in, and to let no bar be wilfully put or kept in the way. Look upon thyself as a diseased condemned rebel, that equally needs to be pardoned, and healed; and implore the grace necessary to both. Throw down thy weapons of rebellion, renounce thy most beloved sin, deliver up thy soul to Christ, to be sanctified, pardoned, made alive to God, and fitted to glorify and please him here, and in the way of holiness, to be led up to the enjoyment of him for ever.

2. Considering ourselves as in a state of grace, but as yet imperfect in attainments, the working out of our salvation includes the mortifying of the remains of corruption in us, the resisting of temptations, the making of additions to grace received, and our pressing on towards glory. And how much has a Christian to do, as to all these?

When any, by the Spirit of life from Christ Jesus, are freed from the tyranny of sin, they feel enough of its remains, to make them sensible their work is not yet done, nor their rest attained to. As long as sin has a being in them, it will be working, and making them cry out with

with the apostle, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* This deadens their hearts, cools their affections, keeps back from duty, and clogs in it: by this their evidences are obscured, and so their joy dampt; their communion with God is interrupted, and their falls multiplied; and so their peace is broken, their spirits wounded, and their hopes mixed with many doubts and fears. When it is thus with them therefore, they are to be working out their salvation, by daily suppressing the first motions of sin, avoiding the occasions of it, and temptations to it, and crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof, as knowing that life and death depends upon it. *Rom. viii. 13. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye thro' the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

They have moreover an adversary, the devil, that continually goes about seeking whom he may devour, whom, in working out their salvation, their business is to resist, as having, and keeping on the whole armour of God, that they may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. By this adversary they are much disturbed in their way to heaven, and obliged to fight their passage to it. Whatever temptation is cast in their way, they are to reject it with abhorrence, to maintain their conflict, and hold on to the last; being assured of grace sufficient, and that the God of peace will e'er long put an end to the combat, to their comfort and joy, by bruising Satan under their feet.

If at any time they let down their watch, and go backward, they are to remember from whence they are fallen, and how much they have suffered; to bewail their folly, renew their repentance, and fly by faith to Christ for pardon and strength, by which they may be enabled to cleave more closely to him.

When they are in darkness and doubts as to the truth of their grace, and so as to their title to glory, their business is, humbly to use all the means God hath appointed, and wait upon him in hope of a blessed issue. They are not to be careless or unconcerned, whilst at a loss whether they belong to Christ now, and shall be admitted to dwell with him at last: but when in this case, by working out their salvation, they are *to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure*, 2 Pet. i. 10. and to endeavour to strengthen and improve every grace by exercise, that when it is stronger, it may be better discerned; that so they, from the discovery of their grace, may argue their title to glory, which they are still to be longing for, and aspiring after. They that feel they have not yet attained, and are far from being perfect, are to follow after, if that they may apprehend that for which they are apprehended of Christ Jesus. As not having yet apprehended, this is the one thing they are to do, even forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, they are to press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, *Philip*, iii. 12, 13, 14.

3. Considering ourselves as mortal and dying out of this world, the working out of our salvation includes our preparing for a removal from it, and our laying up a treasure in another; the disengaging of ourselves from the present state, as dead to it, and risen with Christ; the setting of our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right-hand of God; the often thinking of the blessedness of being with Christ, to reconcile us to death, as the way to it, and our endeavouring to live in the joyful hopes of it, and constant expectations of being called to it.

Having thus seen what is that salvation which we are to aim at, and labour to secure, I go on to consider,

III. What is implied in our being *bid to work out this*, and in the manner it is to be done, *viz. with fear and trembling.*

And here observe, This does not imply, that we can by any thing we can do, merit the salvation, we are commanded to work out. It is by grace we are to be saved, from first to last. *But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness, &c. but according to his mercy he saved us,* Tit. iii. 4, 5.

But the command *to work out our salvation*, in the manner mentioned, *with fear and trembling*, denotes,

1. That it is a work in which the soul is to be engaged. This will have the principal share in salvation when obtained; and therefore is to be the principal agent in labouring after it. Bodily

service profiteth nothing alone, nor will ever bring about the salvation of the soul.

2. That it is a work in which we are to engage with the greatest intenseness. We are to strive to enter in at the strait gate, to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure now, that we may be found of our Lord in peace when he shall come to determine our everlasting state.

3. That, in working out our salvation, the utmost watchfulness is necessary; considering the deceitfulness of our hearts, the snares of the world, the temptations of Satan, the instances of many, that to appearance bid fair for heaven, and after all miscarried, and are sent away to the place of the workers of iniquity. The consideration of such things as these, will feed a deep concern, which will lead the Christian often to put the enquiry, O my soul, am I indeed in the way to heaven? Shall I ever get thither? Are my hopes well grounded? Will they not at last leave me ashamed?

4. It teacheth us, that making conscience of all the means that God hath appointed, comes into the duty of working out our salvation. And,

5. That in this work we are to persevere, and be working out our salvation as long as we remain upon earth; and in this way to be waiting for our rest in heaven; as he only that endureth to the end, shall be saved.

IV. I come to shew, That it is *God that works in all that are saved to will and to do, and this of his good pleasure.* I shall speak to these distinctly.

1. It

1. It is *God that works in all that are saved to will and to do.*

Two things are plain,

(1) That man is naturally averse to the business of his salvation; (2.) That when the aversion is overcome, it is God that does it.

(1.) Man is naturally averse to the business of his salvation. The evidence of this is most obvious, both from the Bible, and the temper of the world. How plain is the command, when the gospel comes directed to all that hear it, to work out their salvation, and how strongly is this urged? But how few can be prevailed upon to set about it? Christ, and his purchase are generally made light of: Grace and glory are neglected, and wretched sinners, instead of working out their salvation, are treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, *Rom. ii. 5.* Though made for eternity, and upon the brink of it, they cannot be persuaded to converse with themselves, and seriously ask, whither they are going, or what is like to become of them for ever?

Sinners: look a little into the frame and temper of your own souls, and how plainly may you find it thus? How few and slight are your thoughts about your eternal concerns? If you try to lift your hearts to God and things above, what a backwardness is there to the very attempt, and how soon is it given over? What an aversion to hearing, prayer, meditation, or any thing that tends to awaken conscience, and impress a sense of your misery, in order to your endeavouring an escape? How strange and sad is it, that such a temper

should

should be found in rational creatures, that when they are in danger of perishing for ever, yea sure to do so, if they do not apply themselves in earnest to securing their salvation, they are averse to their main business in this world, that on which their *All* depends in another !

(2) When mens averfion is overcome, it is God that does it, and gives both the disposition and act to such as are engaged in working out their salvation. Blessed be God that there are any thus employed ; but that they are so, it is owing to an higher power than their own, even to God's, which performeth all things for them. God worketh in them to will and to do, renews their wills, and implants their first grace : thus beginning their salvation, and then enabling them to act according to his grace implanted, in working it out after it is begun.

[1.] In working our salvation, it is God that touches and turns the will, and by his efficacious renewing grace, brings his people to love and chuse what they were before averse to : and thus, he of unwilling, makes them willing. This is expreffed by *giving them a new heart*, and putting a new spirit within them, which he claims as his own prerogative. *Ezek. xxxvi. 26. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, &c.* He removes all obstructions, and then implants a vital principle in the soul, determining it another way than before. Corruption hath taken possession of the heart, and turned off the will from God and all that is good ; and the grace comes from heaven that must so far alter and change it, as to bring the sinner to
love,

love, resolve, and set about his salvation, which before he was so averse to.

In our natural state, sin sways the will, as well as blinds the mind, and nothing short of the grace of God can set us free from it. Till this be done, men *will not frame their doings to turn unto God*, Hosea v. 4. The bias to sin is strong naturally, and encreased by custom, and by both becomes a difficulty, unconquerable to any thing but almighty grace. Into how deplorable a state did man fall when he departed from God? He has no inclination left to return, but runs from him, till effectually called from above. This early appeared in the first man, and is more or less discovered in all others since. God being forsaken, something else is set up in his room, and really preferred before him: and it must be a supernatural light and influence, that must at once persuade and enable a sinner to change the objects of his delight and pursuit. A carnal heart, till renewed, can never fall in with the design of the gospel: But when grace comes in its power, it disarms the will of all its opposing prejudices, and determines it to accept and rejoice in what is offered. God's *working* is the cause of the soul's *willing*; and when he will work, none can hinder him.

He is the Father of spirits, and alone can have access to the soul, to quicken and determine its faculties by his special influence, as he pleases. He is the first author of all holy motion: and no inclination to stir in the way to heaven had been known in the soul, if it had not been produced by himself.

[2.] As God works to will, so likewise to act or do. He excites that grace which he first implants; and thus both the disposition and the act is owing to influence from heaven, as to all that engage in working out their salvation. It is as drawn by him, that we are first inclined to it, and then run after him, *Cant. i. 4.* God's working is the cause both of the soul's choice and pursuit of the salvation offered. The grace necessary to these, is to be begged of him, and the glory of all to be given to him.

It is God that works in those he will recover, both to will and to do.

Before I leave this head, it may not be improper to consider the method God usually takes to incline and engage men to work out their own salvation. But I shall leave this to another discourse.

S E R M O N XXI.

PHILIP. II. 12, 13.

---Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

I Have discoursed in some measure on the Fourth Thing I proposed in my method of opening this text, which was to shew, That it is God *who worketh* in all that are saved, *both to will and to do*, and this of his *good pleasure*: But before I left this head, I thought it might not be improper to consider the method which God usually takes to incline and engage men to *work out their own salvation*; which I now come to do before I proceed farther.

God takes his method usually,

1. He openeth to their souls the lost and miserable state they are in by nature, as having sinned against him, deserved his wrath, and being every moment liable to it. But though this be common case of sinners; the most of them are as unconcerned, as if all things were safe with them. Their eyes are shut, and so they remain secure in the midst of the greatest danger, and would not bestir themselves in working out their salvation, without a very strong and convictive sight
of

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of that wrath and death which sin hath made their portion. And in order to this, where God is pleased to work, light is let in upon the soul, discovering its case. It is to this end the gospel is published, to open sinners eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God. By the help of this light, the first thing the soul is brought to see, is sin; sin as to its rise and progress, nature and effects: How early it began, how universally it is propagated, and the evil it contains in it, and will draw after it; its corrupt fountain, various streams, heinous aggravations, and fearful issue.

When the Spirit comes to put men upon working out their salvation, it begins by convincing them of *sin*, *John* xvi. 8. It makes them sensible, what a guilty depraved state they are fallen into, by which they are fitted for destruction, and bound over to it: It shews them that the divine law is broken, death is deserved and threatned, and the conviction is so brought home to the sinner, that he is made to see himself involved in the common defection, and laid liable to the common ruin.

2. God holds their thoughts close to what is thus discovered, as matter of the highest moment, and of everlasting concern, no longer to be made light of, nor soon despised, as heretofore. There is a strange averfness in all by nature, to the serious consideration of what relates to the soul and another world. The carnal heart is hardly drawn to it, and soon flies off, making every little thing an occasion for a pretence to do so. Hence it is, that men can ordi-

ordinarily hear of sin and death, heaven and hell, salvation and damnation, and easily divert from all, to attend the business or amusements of the present world, upon which they freely let out their thoughts.

They care not to reflect in what state they are, what they have been doing, and what is like to be their portion for ever. They forget God, with whom they have more to do than with all the world besides. *God is not in all their thoughts*, Psal. x. 4. They consider not the evil tendency of their revolt from him, and rebellion against him; how soon they may be called to appear before him, and how fearful a thing it is to fall into his hands, who is as a consuming fire. How different is the temper men discover with reference to their eternal salvation, from what is shewn in things of an infinitely lower nature! *A wretch that is condemned to die to morrow, cannot forget it: And yet, poor sinners that are continually uncertain to live an hour, and certain after death to be in endless happiness or misery, can forget those things for which they have their memories given them chiefly, and the thoughts of which, one would think, should drown all the concerns of this world, as much as the report of a cannon does a whisper. O amazing stupidity! That ever men can forget eternal joy, and eternal woe; the eternal God, and the place of their eternal unchangeable abode, when they stand even at the door, and have so small a distance between them, and that eternal gulf, which as creatures daily dying, they are stepping into. This is the case and carriage of unrenewed sinners.* But

But when the Spirit of God hath, from the word of truth, uncovered the sinner's danger before him, he holds his mind closely to consider it, and calls it back as often as it grows weary and starts aside, and revives the thoughts of what he has been and done ; of what is denounced against every sin by his offended sovereign and final judge, and his concernment in all : And hereupon with the prodigal, he is brought to himself, and enters into a serious debate on his case : *O my soul, how innumerable are my sins ! How great my guilt ! How unutterable the misery I am liable to ! How often and long have I sinned against God, and how express and dreadful is the threatening, The soul that sins shall die ! Can I any longer reckon it a small thing to have broken the righteous law of God, and to make light of being continually exposed to his wrath ? How soon must I be at his bar, to be determined by his sentence to my unchangeable state ? And should I thus go hence, nothing remains for me, but a fearful looking for of wrath and fiery indignation, which, who will be able to abide ?*

3. By such a discovery and view, an impression is made upon the conscience, so that the sinner can no longer rest satisfied in his present state. The passage is opened between the head and heart, so as that what is known and considered, is not entertained as notion, but applied and felt. Hereupon, the sinner is arraigned, tried and cast by himself. It is the voice of the law, *The soul that sins shall die* : conscience witnesses to the charge, and then repeats the doom, *Thou, O soul, hast sinned, and death is thy due.* And here the mind is enlarged to take the most effecting

fecting view of both. The man sees himself beyond measure sinful, and now thinks of nothing but being beyond expression miserable, and presently cries out : *O the God I have offended, the law I have broken, the soul I have destroyed : O the punishment prepared by the divine power, to be measured by no lesser a duration than eternity, as the just wages of sin, and of my sin : Who can dwell with devouring fire ? Who can endure everlasting burnings ?* By this the soul is filled with fear and horror under the real sense of his case.

4. The awakened sinner is led to enquire, What he shall do to be saved, and to do this with an earnestness and importunity some way suitable to the importance of the case. Thus it was with *Peter's* hearers, *Acts ii. 30. Men and brethren, what shall we do ?* and with the jailor, *Acts xvi. 36. Sirs, What shall I do to be saved ?* Who can pacify an offended God, or avert the wrath that sin deserves ? Who can redeem me from the curse of the broken law, or deliver me from going down into the pit ? What way is there for a lost sinner to escape the wrath to come, and obtain salvation and eternal glory ?

5. The enquiring sinner is seasonably instructed in the method of salvation revealed in the gospel : that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life, *John iii. 16.* That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing trespasses to sinners that fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them : that him, *i. e.* Christ, hath God set forth to be a propitiation for sin, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that be-

liveth in Jesus : that he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification, and now ever liveth to make intercession ; whereby he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. None ever miscarried that received him as offered in the gospel, and gave up themselves to him in obedience to his call and claim ; and none ever shall.

6. Salvation being represented as attainable, the sinner, under the divine influence, is led to desire and chuse it, and to hope for it ; and thereupon, to labour after it above any thing else in all the world. God draws to this with the cords of a man, and the bands of love ; opens to the enlighten'd mind the greatness and compass of that salvation which the gospel reveals, and shews that how great soever it is, it may be secured. Upon which the soul, as greatly affected, can't but cry out, O that I may be made partaker of all ! O that Christ, and the salvation he is able and ready to bestow, may be mine ! I can no longer neglect or make light of it, as I have hitherto done. By help from heaven, I will take the course the gospel prescribes, in order to reach it, and hold on seeking, asking, knocking, striving, in hope that my labour in the Lord shall not be in vain. Where any is brought thus to resolve and act, it must be said, 'tis the Lord's doing : he works *to will and do*.

2dly. As to the manner of God's working, 'tis said to be *of his good pleasure*. This denotes,

That 'tis owing to his sovereign grace that he works in any ; and that he is at liberty to work on, or desist, as he pleases.

1. 'Tis owing to his sovereign grace that he works in any. According to his mercy he saveth
us,

us, and worketh in any of us to will and to do, in order to it; and he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. He worketh of his own good pleasure: and so without any constraint, or need on his part; and without, nay contrary to any merit or worthiness on ours.

(1.) Without any constraint, or need on his part. The great God can have no need of us, that he should thus concern himself about us. He is incapable of any addition to his felicity by our recovery; and therefore cannot make this his motive in what he does, in order to it. 'Twas his free choice to make the world, and man in it. And when we were made, and had afterwards destroyed ourselves, what obligation was he under to resolve to save us. When fallen angels are passed by, that he will bring any out of our world to glory, and employ his power and grace to bring us into the way to it, and train us up for it, what true love is this. Among men, what reason can be given for his working on some, and passing by others, but his own good pleasure. 'Tis all without constraint, and need on his part.

(2.) Without, nay contrary to any merit or worthiness on ours. We had no reason to expect, that we should have been put into a state of hope, and under the merciful order to work out our salvation. When we proved deaf to this, and went on in a state of rebellion, how far were we from deserving that God should proceed yet farther, to work in us to will and to do, in order to our recovery.

Take a view of man in his natural state, in his neglect of his salvation, and opposition to it; what can he produce as a plea, for which God should do this for him. What reason is there on the con-

trary to wonder, that God who foresaw all this, should entertain a thought of favour towards him? God, as free, without need on his part, or merit on ours, worketh in any of us sinners, of his own good pleasure.

(2.) Where he works, he works arbitrarily, and is under no obligation to wait on those that neglect or resist his spirit, but may desist when he pleaseth. The spirit, like the wind, bloweth where, and on whom, and for what time it listeth: if we will not set in with it, we have no security of its continued influence. God by his spirit may withdraw, and leave the negligent obstinate sinner when he will.

In whomsoever God works, they are to own it a gracious vouchsafement, one to be highly prized, and to labour to improve it; as now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. 'Tis a very bright and desirable time, that wherein God works; but it may be soon at an end. God says, to day if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts; and he hath not promised, that he will wait for our resolutions till to morrow. He has given us no assurance, that if so much as one motion of his spirit be baffled and quenched, we shall have a second. 'Tis beyond desert, if God works at all; and we have no reason to be secure as presuming he will work on, whether we regard him or not: Wherefore, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

This leads us to the

V. Head, *namely, the force of the reason from God's working in us to will and to do, and this of his good pleasure, to engage us to work out our salvation, and to do it with fear and trembling.*

I. What

1. What reason have we from God's working in us, to excite ourselves to work out our salvation?

2. And what motive have we to do this *with fear and trembling*, as he *worketh of his good pleasure*?

1. What reason have we from God's working in us, to engage us to *work out our salvation*.

The consideration *that God worketh in us*, should engage to this; as it makes it reasonable, possible, hopeful, and easy.

(1.) *Reasonable. Work out your salvation; for it is God that worketh in you*: his hand is stretched out to pluck you as brands out of the burning; let it not be overlooked: his presence is vouchsafed to help on the soul to heaven; let it not be slighted. When the merciful God enjoins us to work out our salvation, because he works in us, to sit still, as if we were unconcerned, is at once to oppose his authority, and contemn his grace, and so to cross the end for which it is vouchsafed. How reasonable is my compliance with his command to exert my utmost endeavours in working out my salvation, when I have the encouraging tokens of his presence and influence, ready to dispose me to work, and to work in and with me? When God leads, how fit is it that I should follow, and be ready to act in obedience to his word, under the kind influence and aids of his Spirit? It is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do; but in a subserviency to him, our endeavours are required, if ever our salvation is wrought out. It must needs be highly reasonable to work out our salvation, when it is God that is working in us with a greater strength than our own.

(2.) This also makes it *possible*. Work out your own salvation; and how difficult soever it may

be, it is enough to carry through all, that God worketh in you, both to will and to do. Were we left to ourselves under the strict command to work out our salvation, the injunction might make us more sensible of our misery, as being unable to perform it; and thereupon lead us to say, *We are wretched apostate creatures, fallen from God, and condemned by him. He hath indeed so far manifested his willingness to save, that he hath set forth his Son a propitiation for sin, to satisfy justice, and purchase a tender of life and salvation: but as ever I would be made partaker of this, I am to turn to God by Jesus Christ, receiving him, and giving up myself to him unfeignedly, and without reserve. This I am sensible is my duty; but what a wretched impotency and disinclination do I find to it? I may as soon remove a mountain, as change the temper of my soul, or turn my heart. This I am to offer at; but as yet could never effect by any strength of my own.* If this was our case, that we of ourselves must work it out, nothing would be left us but despair of obtaining salvation.

But when it is said, *Work out your salvation; for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do,* we may take encouragement. The task, tho' too great for us, is possible to the power and grace ready to be engaged with us. Is there any thing too hard for the Lord? Behold his hand is not shortned that he cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that he cannot hear: he can level mountains, and fill up vallies, and make the way plain to the promised kingdom, for his ransomed ones, whom he is leading thither, by giving them *both to will and to do.*

(3.) This makes it *hopeful.* Work out your salvation,

salvation, and work in hope of a blessed issue; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do. What room for despondency when God undertakes the design, begins the work, and is working on, if you do not break off, or put a bar in his way? The out-goings of God are prepared as the morning, that waxeth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. He begins in love, and he is not wont to leave off, if he be not first deserted by you. In working out your salvation, you take the course which God has prescribed; you are in the way *with him*, and may humbly hope that he will continue *with you*.

(1.) You are in the way *with him*, the way he hath appointed, and in which he requires and loves to find his people; and so it is the way of life and salvation, that which tends to it, and which will issue in it. And,

(2.) While you keep in God's way, working in a subserviency to the blessed design you have in view, even your salvation, you may cheerfully depend on in his working in you and with you, and expect his continued presence and growing gracious assistance. You could no do any thing in working out your salvation, but by help from heaven; and, whilst you are humble and watchful, it will not be withdrawn. Your serious thoughts about your salvation, your desires after it, your endeavours to obtain it, are all of them effects and signs of the divine presence: for we are not sufficient of ourselves, as from ourselves, for any thing of this.

Work out your salvation; for it is God that worketh in you, the God of all grace, who delighteth not in the death of finners; and therefore is working in you, that you may be saved.

He is *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, &c.* Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7. What encouragement does such a name carry with it to such as are working out their salvation, in obedience to his command, and in a dependance upon his grace? O humble souls, often think what a God you have to work in and with you, while you are working out your salvation. And when you find yourselves inclined to this, and engaged in it, do not entertain a desponding thought, that you shall be left by him, and the work cease and come to nought: he hath been at the greatest expence and cost already, by giving his Son to purchase salvation; and having laid the foundation of this, it is a pleasure to him to communicate his Spirit and grace to carry it on. They that are faithful and diligent, in working out their salvation, may comfortably work on in hope of its perfection.

(4.) God's working in us should engage us to work, as this makes it *easy*. How smoothly will the work go on, when grace comes from heaven to lead the soul thither! What is difficult, nay impossible to us, as alone, becomes delightful by help given down from God above. When God draws, the believer runs: and when God works, what should hinder or obstruct him?

Upon these grounds we are obliged to be working out our salvation, *from God's working with us.*

2. We are to work out our salvation, and with *fear and trembling*, from reasons taken from the manner of God's working in and with us, *namely, of his good pleasure.* Now,

(1.) It is certain that without God's working we can do nothing to the securing our salvation. We
act

act but as we are acted, tho' in a way agreeable to the rational nature: and should God cease to work, or withdraw the influences of his Spirit, the soul would be like a ship at sea without a gale of wind, never like to reach its desired haven. Who can think of their dependance upon the divine grace in every step they take in the way to the kingdom of heaven, and not tremble at the bare supposition of being deprived of it, before they are got home.

(2.) It may be, we long neglected to work out our salvation, and refused to receive assisting grace, before we could be prevailed with to set about it: and how justly may the divine influence be withdrawn or denied, when needed, which we have so often forfeited, and rendered ourselves unworthy of? Now, sense of this should hasten, not damp our endeavours for the future, to comply, and heartily concur with the assisting grace of God in working out our salvation.

(3.) We have deceitful treacherous hearts, prone by sloth, and very direct opposition too, to grieve the blessed Spirit of God, when it moveth us to work as we ought in the business of our salvation: and if we turn back from God a while longer, how soon may we be forsaken of it.

(4.) How much is to be done, not only to begin, but to compleat our salvation after it is begun? As often as the sinner looks into his dark mind, his perverse will, his corrupt heart; O the concern he sees reason for, lest all should not be finished in the time allotted.

(5.) The time for all this is uncertain and short. How much is to be done, and how fast is the season for this going away? how soon will it be over, and it may be, much sooner than we are aware of?

(6.) The

(6.) The blessedness is unspeakable that salvation takes in, which may well fill the soul with concern, lest it should come short of it; as it certainly will, should God cease to work: and he is at liberty as to this, working *to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*

(7.) Their case is most dreadful, who by withstanding it in its season of working upon them, forfeit and lose the divine grace and help; and so instead of securing their salvation, fall at last into perdition. What remains, is the

APPLICATION.

And here, 1. What a view does this give us of the stupidity in which sinners are involved, in that when salvation is needed by them all, so few have any concern about it. Salvation to be wrought out for him, speaks the sinner in a very deplorable state now, and in danger of a worse. Much is to be done in order to his being saved; and without it, he is eternally lost. But how small is their number who bestir themselves in this important affair? In what deep security are many buried, minding nothing less than the business of their salvation; and yet, in the neglect of this, have nothing to expect but endless misery for their portion?

How sad is such a case as this, and how affecting should it be to us, to have before our eyes the prospect of multitudes upon the brink of destruction, and doing no more to their escape, than if they were in no danger? How many sink secure into the place of torment, from whence there is no redemption?

2. How great a mercy is the gospel, and how great their privilege who live under it? O the mercy to have our lot cast where we may read and hear of the grace that bringeth salvation, that yet

yet it may be had, and of the way we are to take in order to to it ! O the difference put between us and apostate angels, and between us and many obstinate finners, who once lived under the same gospel with us, where they heard of salvation, but making light of it, are now removed and fallen under greater condemnation.

3. As the command in the text intimates God's desire of sinners salvation, how reasonable must it be in those to whom it is sent, to give way to despair ? Why should I throw up all hope of reaching what God has declared himself so willing I should reach ? Whilst such a command continues, despair must be a sin, and hope a duty ; as despair stops all endeavours and so tends to destruction, but hope is the spring of all we do in working out our salvation ; upon which account we are said *to be saved by hope*, Rom. viii. 24.

He that has bid us to work out our salvation, has, by that very order, bid us admit and nourish hope concerning it ; hope that what we do in obedience to him, and dependance upon him, shall not be in vain.

When I have God's warrant, why should I despair of his help ? I own that I am a lost and perishing creature, but have heard that God delighteth not in the death of sinners, but would rather that they should come to the knowledge of the truth, that they may be saved : and in order to it this is his voice in the gospel, *work out your salvation*. And tho' I have too long delayed ; yet this command being still repeated, leaves some ground of hope.

Say not therefore the accepted time is over, the day of salvation at an end : had we endeavoured
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the working out our salvation formerly, there was hope in our case; but now God will work no more, encourage no farther. How bold and daring must it be, to set bounds to the grace of God, where he himself sets none? how much presumption is carried in this kind of despair, for a creature to take upon him to limit the almighty, and say, so far he can, or will go, and no farther? How much more reasonable is it from the command speaking his desire of sinner salvation, to set about what he enjoins in order to it, and whilst our duty is so plain, never to throw up our hope of his gracious help?

4. How inexcusable will they be who finally perish under the gospel, by which salvation is revealed, and the best helps vouchsafed in order to it; God, who enjoins us to work out our salvation, being ready to work in us to will and to do? With what confusion will every such soul be filled, considering, what salvation includes; in how clear a light it was set, and who commanded them to work out their salvation; considering, how often the command was repeated, and how strongly urged, Behold, *now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation, to day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts*, (Heb. iii. 15.) and considering, that under all these the Spirit was striving with them. The remembrance of this will leave the lost sinner no plea to make, who is found self-destroyed, although God was so ready to help.

Here therefore, before it be too late, let me apply myself to such as have hitherto made it none of their concern, to work out their salvation. It is sad there should be any such, and the more

more so, as it is too plain and common to be denied. Such a temper how light soever made of, is matter at once of wonder and lamentation: For,

(1.) Men cannot without doing violence to themselves, be unconcerned whether they are saved or not. We cannot but be convinced that we carry about with us immortal souls, that are made for eternity, and passing to it; souls that must live forever, but not here. This is what we profess to believe. Now, what violence must they offer to themselves, who can't but be conscious of their being on their way to an everlasting state, and yet are unconcerned what will become of them there?

(2.) What can more debase the human nature, than to live without concern as to our eternal salvation? To be passing by death to judgment, and to have no solicitude, to what state the removing soul must so soon be determined?

(3.) What guilt does this involve in it, to be unconcerned about our salvation under the express command to work it out! As the divine law is thus violated, the lawgiver can't but be greatly provoked and his wrath from heaven be ready to be revealed.

Let me therefore intreat sinners, whose consciences tell them this is their case, presently to awake and set about the one thing necessary, the working out of their salvation. Let the time past of life suffice you, wherein you have forgotten God and your souls; served the world, the flesh and the devil; increased your guilt and corruption, and fitted yourselves for destruction. O sinner, it is high time to change thy work and way, and use as much diligence to save thy soul, and make sure of heaven,

ven, as hitherto thou hast done, to prepare for an everlasting hell.

Consider what you are called to set about, and by whom, and upon what encouragment, *namely*, to work out your salvation, as God is ready to work in you to will and to do of his good pleasure. Shake off all indifference, cherish the motions of his spirit, and work out your salvation with fear and trembling; lest time be gone, and your day over before your work be done. After all that you have done to hasten your destruction, how reasonable is your utmost diligence to fly from the wrath to come, and get into the way of life? And what reason have you to adore the patience and goodness of God, that has spared you so long, and continued you in a state of hope. Be ashamed of the eagerness of sinners to destroy their souls; and henceforward, be as earnest and diligent for the salvation of yours. For *Direction*,

1. Set out under a persuasion of the necessity of salvation, and also of your utmost endeavours to make it sure. Salvation is necessary to all that have immortal souls; and this is not to be had without looking after it.

2. Get as clear apprehensions as possible of the salvation you are to work out, as comprehending a deliverance from all evil, and the possession of all that is desirable; as a salvation which is to be crowned with eternal glory: and under such a view, what labour can be thought too great to make it sure.

3. In working out your salvation, depend upon a higher power than your own, and by earnest cries to heaven, shew you expect all your help from thence. We deceive ourselves if we think
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we have strength sufficient for our own recovery. But though we have not, our case is nevertheless hopeful, it being God that worketh in us to will and to do : and his help, in the way of our duty, we are encouraged to expect. No father upon earth is more ready to give bread to his craving child, than the God of all grace to give his holy spirit to them that ask him. Let your longing eyes be turned towards him, saying, when shall the happy season come, when God will breathe upon my soul, and by light and influence from heaven, bring me into the way to it? And under convictions impressed, pray they may be kept alive, and carried on to a thorough change.

And having your salvation begun in grace, continue your desires and pursuits after the perfection of all in glory. To excite to this,

Consider the nature of your work that it is progressive. If you do not go forward working out your salvation, you are in danger of declining and going back.

Frequently call yourselves to account, to see what progress you make. And when your advances are not proportionable to your time and helps, expostulate the matter with yourselves thus, can I do no more for God and my soul? Can I move no faster, when the wrath to come is that from which I am endeavouring an escape, and heaven is before me, as what I am running for?

And tho' the work is difficult, remember the time of working and labouring is short, but your rest sure, near and everlasting.

Be faithful to the death : and when dying, trust in Christ your master under God the Father, to fulfil his promise, *I will give thee a crown of life, a crown that fadeth not away.*

S E R-

S E R M O N XXII.

REVEL. III. I.

— *I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

IT is the church of *Sardis*, which is here directly spoken to; but what is said to her, may belong to other churches, and to many particular members that are forward professors in them, *Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

In the words are considerable,

1. *The Speaker.*

2. *What is said by him.*

1. *The Speaker*, who is described in the former part of the verse, *These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars.* These words set forth Jesus Christ, the Lord and head of the church, and speak his fitness and furniture for his office and work. He hath *the seven spirits of God*, which is commonly understood of the *Holy Ghost*, who though but one, hath plenty and various gifts and graces, which are here described by the number *seven*. And suitable to this description of the spirit, St. *John* tells us, *Ch. iv. 5.* he saw an emblem of it. *There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.* And, as he was to write to the *seven Asian churches*, in each of which the spirit was

was to correct what was found amiss, and communicate the grace wanted, Christ had that spirit in a sufficiency for every one of them; that they might look to no other, nor despair when looking to him.

It pleased the Father, that in him should all fullness dwell: to denote which, he is here said to have *the seven spirits of God*, and *John iii. 34.* That *God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him.* Whatever gifts or graces of the Holy Ghost are necessary to the sanctification, comfort and perfection of his people, all these Christ hath to bestow: *he hath the seven spirits of God.*

Besides this, it is added, *he hath the seven stars.* By *stars* are meant the ministers of the churches; and the seven stars here, have reference to the ministers of the seven churches, to which St. *John* is now ordered to write. And Christ is represented in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, *Chap. i. 13.* and as *having seven stars in his right hand*, ver. 16; which he explains himself, ver. 20. *The seven stars are the angels (or ministers) of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest, are the seven churches.*

Some will have the *seven churches* and what is said of them, to be understood of the several states of the christian church to the end of the world. However this is to be understood, Christ's concern for the ministers of his churches is plainly denoted: such as answer their character, belong to him, and he is ready to own it: *he hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars.* How amiable a description is this of Christ, and with what satisfaction may our thoughts dwell upon it!

Has he the Holy Ghost in his various gifts and

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graces, and this to bestow as a communicate head? We may be hence assured, that justice is satisfied by what Christ hath done and suffered. Nothing can be a greater evidence of this, than his having the spirit to bestow : that spirit which we had forfeited by sin, and grieved away ; that spirit that we were unworthy of, and for our own sakes could no more expect. How precious is that blood Christ shed for us, as the fruit of which, he has the Holy Ghost in all his gifts and graces to give out to us !

Again, such as are lost and would be healed and saved, are hence directed to look only to Christ, as there is salvation in no other. There is no salvation without the grace of the Spirit : and the fulness of this dwells in Christ, who is head over all things to the church.

Again, as Christ has the Spirit in all his graces and gifts, what relief may this yield his members under their sad complaints by reason of remaining corruption, weakness and imperfection ! It is not yet with them throughout as they could wish : they are groaning under a body of death, and longing for deliverance : they want greater enlargedness in prayer, strength to duty, victory over temptations, patience under suffering : they would fain be more conformed to Christ now, and so, better prepared to be with him above. And amidst all this, with what comfort may they look unto Jesus, as having the Spirit of God in the fullest manner to bestow, to rectify what is amiss, supply what is wanting, perfect what he has begun, and safely guide them to all the blessedness he has promised, and is preparing for them ! Under this

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character,

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character, as having the Holy Ghost in all his gifts and graces, he is sufficient, and may be firmly trusted for all.

He has moreover *the seven stars*, the ministers of the *seven churches*, and of all others : he has them to give them light, direct their motion, furnish them with influence; to hold them forth to shine, and when he sees good, to remove them out of sight. All this is included in Christ's being said to *have the stars*. He hath an interest in them, a concern about them, a dominion over them, so as none can be said to have besides him.

And have ministers, as *stars*, all their light from Christ? It is hence plain, they are to shine for him, and direct souls to him. If any of the *stars* are excellent and useful, it is all owing to the Sun of righteousness, and the glory is entirely to be given to him. One *star* may differ from another in glory; but it is all of it derived from this sun; and ministers are to divert their eyes from themselves, and give the glory of it to him. How excellently is he qualified to be the head of the church, who hath both the *stars*, and also the Spirit of God, to furnish and fit them for their office and work, by making them burning and shining lights?

Now as he hath both the *stars* and *Spirit*, let it be the prayer of us all to him, that the *former* may never be left without the *latter*. Ministers without the Spirit, tho' called *stars*, cannot enlighten a dark mind, or melt a stony heart, and the Spirit will ordinarily work by means. Pray therefore the Lord and head of the church, that you may not have ministers *alone*, but the Spirit of God with them, both in his gifts and graces. And where

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such are vouchsafed, remember, they are the gift of Christ, the person who here speaks.

2. We have what is said by him, something very awful and affecting, *I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

He here gives us,

1. A solemn declaration of his own knowledge, with reference to the works of the church of *Sardis*; and he hath not only a knowledge of hers, but of those of every other church and person: *I know thy works.*

2. An inference from thence by way of charge against her, *viz.* That she had *a name that she lived, and yet she was dead.*

Accordingly we may observe,

I. That Christ hath a perfect knowledge of every one's works.

II. That whosoever he be that has a name to live, and yet is dead, is known to Christ, as what he really is.

I. Christ hath a perfect knowledge of every one's works. Every one of us is to hear Christ now speaking this, as if it were to himself, *I know thy works.*

Here we are to consider,

1. In what extent we are to understand *the works*, which Christ is said to know; and,

2. In what manner he knows them.

1. In what extent we are to understand *the works*, which Christ is said to know. Works here, are not to be taken as distinguished from words and thoughts, but in the largest sense, as including both, even all that we think, speak and do; the motions of the heart within, that may

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go no farther, as well as what, in pursuit of these, is reduced to act. Works good and bad, in this extent are known to Christ, *Prov. v. 21. For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* *Prov. xv. 3. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. All things are naked, and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do,* *Heb. iv. 13.* His knowledge takes in whatever relates to our hearts, or course, the inward, or the outward man. The Psalmist mentions not only deeds and words, as open to God, but thoughts; yea, the most secret motions and imaginations of the heart. *Psalms cxxxix. 1---4. O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising: thou understandest my thoughts afar off, i. e. before they are known by ourselves, or long after we have forgotten them. Thou compassedst my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.* We may see the like from other places: as *Job xxxi. 4. Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps?* And that others may not think themselves passed over, it is said *Job xxxiv. 21, 22. For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.*

Men are apt to imagine, their thoughts are free, and that what is confined to their own breasts, must be undiscovered: but the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts, *1 Chron. xxviii. 9.*

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Mens works and words are many, but their thoughts are more. How many thousands of these spring up in the soul in a day? But none of these escape God's notice, *Isaiab lxvi. 28. For I know their works and their thoughts.* Thoughts are as words to God, and words as actions; and the one as well known to him, as the other.

And this is expressly asserted of Christ, *John ii. 23--25.* He being at *Jerusalem* at the passover, many, it is said, *believed in his name*, i. e. professed to do so, *when they saw the miracles which he did.* But *Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.* He knows mens natures and dispositions, their qualities and affections, their purposes and designs, their motives, aims and ends, and so the state and condition of their souls; whether converted or carnal, sincere or unsound, such as belong to him, obey and love him in reality, or but in pretence.

He told *Judas* of his secret purpose to betray him, the *woman of Samaria* of her secret adultery, *Nathaniel* of his integrity, saying, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile*; and here, the church of *Sardis* of her hypocrisy: *I know thy works*, i. e. and know them to be otherwise than they appear to be to the world.

This brings us to consider,

2. In what manner Christ knows mens works.

(1.) The knowledge Christ has of the works of men, is *most clear*. He does not take up with appearances, but sees through every disguise, and takes things as they really are. Men may by art
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and colour hide themselves from the eyes of men, and be taken for others than they are; but there is no screen from the eye of Christ. He is represented as having eyes *as a flame of fire*, Rev. i. 14. to pierce thro' every veil, as the beams of the sun through the most transparent glass. He judges not according to appearance, but righteous judgment, or judgment according to truth. Hence, he often charges the *pharisees* with hypocrisy, notwithstanding the reputation they had of more than ordinary holiness, and compareth them to *whited sepulchres*, which had a fair outside, but within were full of dead mens bones and all uncleanness.

(2.) The knowledge Christ hath of the works of men, is *immediate*, not by report from others, but from his own all-penetrating light and inspection. If we see things most exactly, it is by the light of the sun; but the Son of righteousness, as God, seeth every thing by his own light, and borrows light from no other, for his information. When on earth in his humble state, *he knew all men*, and needed not a testimony from any other, in order to it; for he knew what was in man: and you are not to have lower thoughts of him in his exalted state. He directly knows every man's works.

(3.) The knowledge Christ hath of the works of men, is *perfect and full*. Perfect as to their number; none of them escape his notice or regard: perfect as to their nature and circumstances, and as to the springs and aims of those that do them. There are two things in men that are secret to one another, *viz.* the principles from which they act, and the ends at which they aim. These are like

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the path of which *Job* speaks, *which the vulture's eye hath not seen*, *Job* xxviii. 7. But, even as to these Christ knows mens works. He has before him what we did in all times and places, and stages of life: in childhood and youth, in manhood and riper years. Works that we may have forgotten, are known to him, and remembered by him.

(4.) The knowledge Christ has of the works of men, is *infallible* and liable to no mistake. He cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked.

(5.) *Lastly*, The knowledge Christ has of the works of men is *with approbation*, or *dislike*, *according as they are found* to be good, or bad. He knows those of the humble serious christian, and accepts of him and them; but looks with abhorrence upon the deceiver, who has a name to live, and yet is dead.

But this brings me to the

II. Thing observed, *viz.* Whoever he be that hath a name to live, and yet is dead, is known to Christ, as what he really is.

Here let me briefly shew,

1. What is implied in *having a name to live*.
2. That such a name one may have that is spiritually dead.
3. The sadness of *having a name to live*, if there is no more.

1. To shew what is implied in *having a name to live*. This in general is to be understood of the reputation any may have of being in a state of grace, and rescued from that they were in by nature, which the scripture speaks of as a state of death. Real christians are, by the quickening Spirit

Spirit, brought into a special union to Christ, and so yield themselves unto God through him, as those that are alive from the dead : they are born from heaven, and tending thither ; being turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God : they are justified in the blood of Jesus, and so delivered from condemnation, and entitled to heaven : they are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, and so made partakers of the divine nature, preparing them for heaven : they are adopted into God's family, made his children, and have many privileges peculiar to such in their way to heaven, with the promise of a glorious inheritance reserved for them there, at the end of it. Now to be reputed some of this happy number, is *to have a name to live*.

They that are really in a state of grace may be justly said to live : as such souls live to the best purpose ; for to them *to live, is Christ* : as they only are prepared to take the comfort of life, even of the natural one ; they being justified by faith, and at peace with God : as they are out of the reach of the sting of death, and so need not thro' fear of it, pass their lives in bondage : as they are near a blessed immortality, in which they are to live for ever. To be thus privileged is to be alive indeed ; and all true christians are so : but some may *have a name* for this, and yet be none of the number.

And such *a name* may be acquired.

(1.) By a freedom from the grosser pollutions of the world. The prophane person indeed that makes a trade, and a boast of sin, cannot be said to *have a name to live* : such a one, may easily know, that he is not written among the living in *Jerusalem*.
Conscience

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Conscience may tell those who wallow in all manner of uncleanness, that they are dead indeed. And if they have fallen back to this course, after they have made a profession of being followers of *Christ*; if after they seemed to begin in the Spirit, they end in the flesh; such may be said to be twice dead, and in the most deplorable case of any others: *For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them,* 2 Pet. ii. 21. Freedom from gross enormities is a first and chief reason of those having a name to live that are really dead. The *Pharisee* our Lord speaks of, would in vain have pretended to a reputation for holiness, if he could not have begun his own commendation with this boast, *I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, &c.*

(2.) A *name to live*, as it implies an open and visible profession of subjection to *Christ*, a joining with his people in his worship and ordinances, and an holding on some time in such a course; so it may arise from these. Mere negatives are not sufficient to denominate a man religious: there must be a form of godliness, a doing materially and externally what the people of God do, in order to our passing for some of the number.

(3.) A *name to live* may result from experiencing the common operations of the Spirit of God, which for a time may look hopeful and promising. Many may have great convictions for sin, and affecting apprehensions of deserved wrath, warm motions and strivings of the Spirit, shewing them the reasonableness of resolving for God, and
Christ,

Christ, and holiness, and heaven, against what would stand in their way and betray them to destruction; and such convictions may produce some reformati^ons, and as to what is outward, a strictness in walking: and where these abide a considerable time, they tend to procure to the persons in whom they are seen, the credit of a *name to live*.

(4.) These convictions and external reformati^ons may be accompanied with excelling gifts, enlargedness and remarkable workings of affection in the duty of prayer, joy and delight in hearing and attending upon the supper of the Lord, frequency in acts of self-denial and mortification, and with speaking of these with visible pleasedness and satisfaction: there may be great head-knowledge and ability to discourse of hypocrisy itself with appearing abhorrence, and of sincerity with signs of love to it; and yet all these may be found in one unchanged at heart. But where many of such things meet in a professor, he may *have a name to live*, a creditable one: which brings me,

2. To shew, that such a name some professors of christianity may have, who are all the while they bear it, spiritually dead. The church of *Sardis* is here mentioned as an instance of this: and we find that the church of *Laodicea* boasted of her being rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing; not knowing that she was wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked, *Rev.* iii. 17. There may be a *name to live*, where the power of sin was never broken, nor the heart taken off from the habitual love of it.

If it be asked, With whom such may *have a name to live*? A negative answer is obvious, not
with

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with *him who seeth not as man seeth*. It is known unto God, who are sincere, and who are not. And Christ expressly declares his knowing the case of those within his church, as it is : *I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead*. He has eyes like a flame of fire, piercing into every heart : hence some that claim a relation to him, and call him once and again, *Lord*, he will bid depart from him another day, as those that were never his, but workers of iniquity, and known by him to be such. Hypocrites therefore, cannot have *a name to live* with either God or Christ.

But, 1. They may have a name to live, *with themselves* : they may reckon themselves in a state of grace, when they are all the while in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity. This, the apostle tells us was his own case while he was a *Pharisee*, Rom. vii. 9. *I was alive without the law once, i. e.* concluded myself in a safe and happy state.

And sinners being *alive*, or having *a name to live* in their reckoning of themselves, shews itself,

(1.) In the security that reigns in their souls. They dread no danger, tho' the nearest to it, but cry, *Peace, Peace*, to themselves, when sudden destruction is coming upon them. They are in the case we read of, *Luke xi. 21. The strong man armed keepeth his palace in them, and his goods are in peace*. While many serious humble christians are watching and trembling, they sleep securely ; and as they live, so they sometimes die : they have no bands in their death ; no doubts but what they can easily solve ; no difficulties but which they can get over. They may have secret gripes and fears through conscience beginning

ning to awake and stir; but the qualm is soon over, and they settle upon their lees.

(2) Sinners shew their good opinion of themselves, in the hope they keep up of their safety with reference to their souls and eternity. None indeed are to despair of salvation in the gospel-way; as it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners: but the man that is not born again deceives himself, if, without this, he hopes to enter into the kingdom of God. However this the hypocrite does, which increases his danger now, as it will his disappointment at last.

Hope without a promise must leave the sinner ashamed; and, *what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?* Job xxvii. 8. Such are without any hope that will hold; any hope springing from union to Christ, and begotten by his Spirit, and quickening to earnest endeavours after purity and greater degrees of it; any hope of which a just reason can be given: but notwithstanding this, an hope they will maintain, and thereby they shew they take themselves to be alive unto God.

(3.) They may have a superficial joy in spiritual things as the stony ground hearers had in receiving the word: and thus, with themselves they have a name to live.

2. They may have a name to live *among others*, and these the friends and followers of Christ. Such are apt to judge charitably, and prefer others to themselves; but all this is no security to them; as they are to be tried by an all-discerning judge, and according to his sentence must fare for ever.

This

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This leads us to consider,

3. The sadness of the case, to *be dead*, under a *name to live*, or of being alive.

(1.) *A name to live*, if we are *dead*, is vain and empty. The gain that will come in by it, will stand the hypocrite in no stead, when God taketh away the soul.

(2.) *A name to live*, if we are *dead*, is dangerous, as tending to keep the sinner in his dead state, and prevent his recovery : as a sick man that fancies himself well, is often the farthest off from a cure.

(3.) *A name to live*, upon a mistaken ground, will render death and judgment doubly terrible to those that go away under the delusion. How great must be their fall, how aggravated their misery, who after all their dreams of safety and happiness, and compassings of themselves about with sparks of their own kindling, meet with this only from the hand of God, to be bid lie down in sorrow !

APPLICATION.

1. Does Christ know every man's works ? How strange is it that it should be brought into dispute, whether he be truly and properly God ! This is the prerogative of the Deity, and a proof of it, 1 Kings viii. 39. *For thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men, i. e. what is in them, and what proceeds from them, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. The Lord searcheth all hearts, &c.* And, as Christ does so, we may from this conclude him God.

2. Does Christ know the works of every man ? What ignorance or unbelief does it argue in such as sin securely, if they can but do it secretly ? *i. e.*
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if they can hide their works from the eyes of men ; as if it were not infinitely more dangerous to have all shameful actions *naked and open* to the eye of Christ, from which no darkness can be found wherein the workers of iniquity can be hidden, and pass unobserved.

3. What seriousness becomes us whenever we engage in any holy duty or religious worship, as all our works are known to Christ ? How striking should be the thought, the Lord of glory looks on and sees what I am doing, and how !

4. What reason have we to be humble in a review of our own works, as they are all known to Christ, and, as many of them are such as we have cause to fear, he at once observed, and disapproved ? And, how thankful should the penitent believer be for the good news of a *fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, the blood of Jesus, that cleanseth from all sin ?

5. How fit is Christ to be the Judge of all men at the last day, who knows every man's works now, and will then prove he does so, by giving to every man according to what he hath done in the body, whether it be good or bad !

6. How big with terror to hypocrites is the doctrine, That Christ *knows their works*, and *knows that they themselves are dead*, notwithstanding their *having a name to live* ! The less they believe or think of this now, with the greater confusion will they be covered, in the day when he shall say to many of those who cry to him, *Lord, Lord : I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

7. The

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7. The hearts of those in whom there is no guile allowed, may take comfort in the thoughts that Christ knows their works, and knows them to be the fruits of his Spirit and grace in them ; and that they endeavoured in the doing them to approve themselves to him, as valuing his approbation more than that of all the world.

8. May one that has a name to live be spiritually dead? Hence learn that saving religion is an inward thing. *He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly*, and no more ; hath not all that is necessary to denominate him an *Israelite* indeed : *but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.* The power of godliness must support the form, in such as would hope for acceptance in the day of Christ.

9. When Christ declares, *I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead*, with what solicitude should every one make the enquiry, *Lord, is it I?* or, Am I among the inwardly defective and dead number of the outward professors of christianity? and never rest satisfied, without some good ground to hope, that the awful charge may not be laid against him?

10. How inconsiderable a thing is it to be judged of man in his day! of man that looketh only on the outside in his day, which will soon be over ; and so, it is no great matter whom he approves or condemns. Our chief concern is with one infinitely greater : he that judges us is the Lord.

Lastly, How terrible will the day of *Christ's* coming be to the self-deceiving hypocrite, and how joyful to the humble saint !

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